

FRAMING THE 2004 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION:  
THE ROLE OF MEDIA, POLITICAL DISCUSSION, AND OPINION LEADERS  
DISSERTATION

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School of The Ohio State University

By

Rebecca Border Sietman, B.A., M.A.

\* \* \* \* \*

The Ohio State University  
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Dissertation Committee:

Dr. Gerald M. Kosicki, Adviser

Dr. William P. Eveland

Dr. Carroll J. Glynn

Dr. Matthew C. Nisbet

Approved by

\_\_\_\_\_  
Adviser  
School of Communication Graduate Program

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the 2004 Presidential election, both the “top-down” and “bottom-up” processes, by integrating the research areas of media framing, social identity, political discussion, and opinion leadership. In addition to replicating prior research, this study extended these areas of research to consider the possible differential effects that these “top down” and “bottom up” processes may have had on political efficacy and mobilization based on partisan identity. I conducted a quantitative content analysis of media with some qualitative observations, a secondary analysis of the National Election Studies 2004 time-series data, and a field study of the volunteer opinion leaders for the political campaigns in the battleground state of Ohio.

Examining the media content during the two months prior to the election, I found that the polarization frame was used quite frequently across two different types of media, newspapers and television. While the use of the polarization frame did not seem to vary over time during those two months, certain key words and phrases indicating the presence of the polarization frame were more prominent in news coverage. The campaign media at times portrayed the United States as consisting of blue states, red states, and battleground

states; as a nation sharply divided; as a nation consisting of a polarized electorate, split 50/50; as a nation of clashing cultures; as a nation filled with bitter, angry people.

The survey results indicate that attention to media coverage of the campaign, frequency of political discussion with family and friends, and opinion leadership are all significant predictors of political efficacy and mobilization. In addition to these main effects, the survey results suggest that the effects of media attention, political discussion, and contact with an opinion leader are sometimes moderated by partisan identity. Replicating prior work on the functional role of opinion leadership, opinion leaders of the 2004 presidential election tended to have higher levels of education, paid more attention to media coverage of the campaign, more frequently discussed politics with family and friends, and had higher levels of political participation.

The field study results lend additional support to the importance of opinion leaders as well as political discussion in the “bottom up” processes of the 2004 election. Many of my observations suggest that contact with an opinion leader has a positive relationship with political efficacy and mobilization but that this relationship is often dependent on partisan identity. These opinion leaders were not only important in motivating people to vote and to participate politically, the opinion leaders themselves experienced an increased sense of political efficacy as a result of volunteering on behalf of the campaigns. In addition, my interactions with the volunteers suggest that opinion leaders more frequently discuss politics with others and that they may be more likely than others to discuss politics within heterogeneous networks of diverse political views.

Dedicated to my family

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## VITA

- December 21, 1976 . . . . . Born - Hollywood, Florida
- 1999 . . . . . B.A. Communication Arts, Cedarville University
- 1997 - 1999 . . . . . College newspaper editor,  
Cedarville University, Cedarville, Ohio
- 1999 - 2002 . . . . . Legal writer and editor,  
Nancy A. Roberson Co., L.P.A., Kettering, Ohio
- 2000 - 2003 . . . . . Graduate Teaching & Research Associate,  
The Ohio State University
- 2002 . . . . . M.A. Communication, The Ohio State University
- 2003-2005 . . . . . Instructor of Communication Arts,  
Director of Debate,  
Cedarville University, Cedarville, Ohio
- 2005-present . . . . . Assistant Professor of Communication Arts,  
Director of Debate,  
Cedarville University, Cedarville, Ohio

## FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field: Communication

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand (*Mark 3:25*)

Talk of division seems to characterize the politics of the 2004 Presidential election. Take, for instance, the opening sentences from a recent popular book written by a former adviser and pollster for President Bill Clinton and Vice President Al Gore:

America is divided. We live during a moment in history when the two big political parties have fought to draw, reflecting the intense partisanship of our times. The loyalties of American voters are now almost perfectly divided between the Democrats and the Republicans, a historic political deadlock that inflames the passions of politicians and citizens alike. This is a deepening divide, giving us the Two Americas, with immense consequences for our politics (Greenberg, 2004, p. 2).

Or, note the following excerpt from a stump speech given by former Senator John Edwards on December 29, 2003:

Today, under George W. Bush, there are two Americas, not one: One America that does the work, another America that reaps the reward. One America that pays the taxes, another America that gets the tax breaks. One America that will do anything to leave its children a better life, another America that never has to do

a thing because its children are already set for life. One America—middle-class America—whose needs Washington has long forgotten, another America—narrow-interest America—whose every wish is Washington’s command. One America that is struggling to get by, another America that can buy anything it wants, even a Congress and a President  
([www.mintruth.com/wiki/index.php?Two%20Americas](http://www.mintruth.com/wiki/index.php?Two%20Americas)).

Not surprisingly, this talk of division is evident in media as well:

Finally from us this evening, houses divided. It's been a very polarizing campaign, as you know. Passions are high. Emotions are raw. The electorate is split right down the middle between President Bush and Senator Kerry (Peter Jennings, ABC News, November 1, 2004).

The question remains, however, as to whether this talk of division had any effects on the American public. Specifically, how did the framing of the 2004 Presidential election affect public opinion as manifested by political efficacy and mobilization?

To answer this question, the present study looks to framing theory, social identity theory, and the role of media, political discussion among citizens, and opinion leaders in the framing and public opinion processes. First, both framing and social identity theory provide a theoretical basis for this study. I consider the “top down” processes of media framing by examining campaign news from both television and newspapers in a content analysis. The content analysis investigates the existence and the prevalence of the polarization frame in media coverage of the 2004 election. This polarization frame is essentially the talk of division as discussed in the opening examples from Greenberg (2004), former Senator John Edwards, and ABC News. To consider the influence that

the polarization frame may have had on citizens' political efficacy and mobilization and how partisan identity may have been a key factor in this, I use survey data from the National Election Studies. While a direct measure of exposure to the polarization frame is unavailable in the NES data, I use items measuring attention to media coverage of the campaign as an indirect way of assessing exposure to the polarization frame.

Second, while many studies concentrate solely on media framing as a top-down process affecting citizens, I also consider the "bottom up" processes that are at work in a context such as the Presidential election of 2004. In this study, I explore political discussion as one important "bottom up" process. Again using the NES data and considering the importance of partisan identity, I analyze how political discussion among family and friends may have influenced political efficacy and mobilization in the context of the 2004 election.

To assess another "bottom up" process, I examine the role of opinion leadership in the 2004 election. Across the United States, specifically in those states classified as "battleground states," both the Bush and Kerry campaigns gathered large "armies" of volunteer citizens. In many respects, these volunteer citizens, who devoted their time, energy, and efforts to encouraging others to vote could be considered key opinion leaders during the 2004 election campaign. Thus I explore opinion leadership in two ways: 1) using NES data once again to consider how opinion leadership may have differentially affected citizens' political efficacy and mobilization based on partisan identity; and 2) using my observations from a field study I conducted of Bush and Kerry volunteers in the battleground state of Ohio.

Together, the three methods—content analysis, survey research, and field work—create an interesting picture of the 2004 election. Specifically, this study provides evidence for how both the “top down” processes involving media and the “bottom up” processes involving political discussion and opinion leadership affected the political efficacy and mobilization of citizens during the 2004 Presidential election.

## CHAPTER 2

### CONCEPTS AND LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I will discuss each of the concepts relevant to this study by reviewing the appropriate literature. First, I will present the three main concepts of this study—media framing, political discussion, and opinion leaders. Then I will give a brief overview of social identity theory, political efficacy and mobilization, and a number of other concepts that will be important in examining media framing, political discussion, and opinion leaders. Finally, I will conclude this chapter by connecting each of the concepts together into a coherent whole and providing specific research questions and hypotheses to guide my research.

#### Framing

Communication scholars have long been interested in examining the effects of mass media on individuals and society from a variety of theoretical perspectives (e.g., Blumer, 1933; Chaffee, 1977; Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet, 1949; McLeod & Detenber, 1999; Rubin & Haridakis, 2000). Over the past few decades, framing is one such theoretical perspective that researchers have used to facilitate more understanding about the effects of mass media (e.g., Davis, 1995; Missika & Bregman, 1987; Raghubir, & Johar, 1999; Sotirovic, 2000). As Hallahan (1999) asserts, “An exhaustive literature search suggests the existence of more than 1,000 citations about framing in the academic

literature” (p. 209). Framing is not only utilized within other disciplines such as psychology (e.g., Gross & D’Ambrosio, 2004; Hasseldine, 2003; Kanner, 2004), sociology (e.g., Esacove, 2004; McVeigh, Welch, & Bjarnason, 2003; Frickel, 2004), and political science (e.g., Kaye, 2003; Nelson, 2004; Walsh, 2004), but framing is also studied within a variety of communication contexts including political communication (e.g., De Vreese, Peter, & Semetko, 2001; Rhee, 1997), public relations (e.g., Hallahan, 1999; Knight, 1999), health communication (e.g., Edwards, Elwyn, Covey, Matthews, & Pill, 2001), and interpersonal communication (e.g., Solomon, Dillard, & Anderson, 2002; Watanabe, 1993).

With contributions from multiple disciplines across multiple contexts, it is no surprise that scholars do not consistently define framing in the same way (Scheufele, 1999b), nor is it surprising that there is disagreement about how framing is related to other media effects perspectives such as agenda setting and media priming (e.g., Jasperson, Shah, Watts, Faber, & Fan, 1998; Kosicki, 1993, 2001; Price & Tewksbury, 1997; Scheufele, 2000a). Despite these different perspectives, the framing literature suggests that media frames serve a unique function in public discourse (Pan & Kosicki, 2004) and that media frames have consequences for how the audience understands public issues (Gamson, 1992; Kinder & Sanders, 1996). To begin providing a clear theoretical basis for my research, I will first define how ‘frames’ and ‘framing’ have come to be used in the discipline of communication and the implications of this for communication science. Next, I will discuss what agenda-setting and media priming are and how framing is distinct from these perspectives. I will then summarize conceptualizations of media frames. Finally, I will present the empirical results of framing studies in terms of

audience effects and then summarize how I approach framing, specifically media framing, in this study.

#### *Definition of 'Frames' and 'Framing'*

As previously stated, researchers do not consistently define framing in the same way (Scheufele, 1999b). However, as Pan and Kosicki (2001) suggest, most scholars tend to define framing in light of Goffman (1974). According to Goffman (1974), frames are “schemata of interpretation” that allow people to organize life events “into something that is meaningful” (p. 21). In other words, frames are a way of defining situations. “A frame reveals a persistent point of view, which is shared on some level and communicable. It organizes our experiences and renders meaning to such organized information” (Pan & Kosicki, 2001, p. 38). Taking this notion of defining situations a step further, Entman (1993) claims that frames 1) “define” problems, 2) point out potential “causes” for the problems, 3) judge the source of the problems, and 4) give possible solutions to the problems. Whether or not frames define situations in general or problems more specifically, framing can be viewed as “a conceptual framework for examining the details of how issues are conceptualized in public discourse as highly contested matters over which there is often considerable disagreement” (Kosicki, 2001, p. 18). From the perspective of communication researchers, framing serves as an important function of the news media because journalists relay information about events that are more easily understood by the public if organized in a meaningful way. Essentially, framing research examines how “issues are presented” by the news media and the impact that these presentations may have on public perception of the issues (Price & Tewksbury, 1997, p. 184).

This two-fold process of “presenting and comprehending news” can be viewed as representing “two concepts of framing”: media frames and audience (or individual) frames (Scheufele, 1999b, p. 106). The first concept, media frame, relates to the presentation of news. A media frame is “a central organizing idea or story line that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events. ... The frame suggests what the controversy is about, the essence of the issue” (Gamson & Modigliani, 1987, p. 143). When information is presented in the news, individuals use frames to understand that information; thus audience frames are “mentally stored clusters of ideas that guide individuals’ processing of information” (Entman, 1993, p. 53). Druckman (2001) suggests a similar distinction between two concepts of framing, using instead the terms *frames in communication* and *frames in thought*, with frames in communication being more synonymous with media frames and frames in thought being more synonymous with audience frames. He then defines a framing effect as the process whereby frames in communication influence frames in thought. Gamson and Meyer (1996) also reflect on this dual nature of framing: “Frames are, on the one hand, part of the world, passive and structured; on the other, people are active in constructing them. Events are framed, but we frame events” (p. 276). Pan and Kosicki (2004) contend that, despite the difference in terminology, these two components are evident in most conceptualizations of framing: “Frames are generally considered to reside in both discourse and individuals’ cognitions, and framing refers to a process of social influences that connects the two” (p. 11).

It could be argued, then, that framing is a theory of social influence. As such, framing incorporates the issues of power and inequality, social integration and identity, and social change (cf. McQuail, 2000). Framing incorporates power and inequality in



that the act of framing itself may be seen as the expression of power; indeed, frames themselves have power (Reese, 2001). In fact, “Successful political communication requires the framing of events, issues, and actors in ways that promote perceptions and interpretations that benefit one side while hindering the other” (Entman, 2003, p. 417). But as Pan and Kosicki (2001) suggest, the power to frame an issue is not automatically in the hands of “political elites or media” but is available to ordinary citizens who participate in public deliberation (p. 37).

In addition, framing incorporates social integration and identity in that frames can promote one common way (or several common ways when there are competing frames) of viewing an issue. For example, frames have been described as “organizing” information in a way that is “socially shared” (Reese, 2001, p. 11). Frames organize information cognitively by suggesting how one might think about an issue and culturally by suggesting how one might understand the information in a social context (Reese, 2001). Frames may be socially shared to the extent that people accept the frame as a legitimate one. President Bush’s initial framing of the war on terror immediately following 9/11 was shared in the sense that Congress, the media, and the public generally expressed their “approval” (Entman, 2003, p. 416).

Finally, framing incorporates the issue of social change in that frames can either reinforce or challenge the dominant social structure. Thinking further about the example of post 9/11 framing, the use of the “evil” frame reinforced the dominant social structure by promoting “deference to presidential authority that typically occurs during wartime” (Entman, 2003, p. 416). However, the dominant social structure was challenged when this frame was contested by a different frame, a counterframe (Entman, 2003). Indeed,

Pan and Kosicki's (2001) definition of framing, "to participate in public deliberation strategically, both for one's own sense making and for contesting the frames of others" (p. 39), supports the idea that framing naturally involves competition. As such, this competition may or may not end in social change, but the potential for social change is evident.

### *Framing and the Implications for Communication Science*

The definitions of frames and framing as they have come to be used in the discipline of communication are unusual as compared to other social science fields. Before I present several ways in which the communication perspective is unique, let me first briefly describe the way in which frames and/or framing are commonly treated in other social science disciplines. For example, one common theme in political science framing research is elites, whether political scientists are looking at the moderators of elite framing effects (e.g., Druckman & Nelson, 2003) or are simply putting forth evidence about the power of elite frames to influence policy (e.g., Kaye, 2003). This emphasis on political processes and elites specifically is evident in much of the political science literature that does not address framing (e.g., Valentino, Hutchings, & White, 2002; Zaller, 1992). In contrast, framing in sociology often focuses on social movements (e.g., Esacove, 2004; McVeigh, Welch, & Bjarnason, 2003) or collective action frames (e.g., Frickel, 2004; Gamson, 1992), both of which have distinctly sociological origins (Snow & Benford, 1992; Snow, Rochford, Worden, & Benford, 1986). Framing studies in psychology emphasize individual attitudes (e.g., Hasseldine & Hite, 2003; Kanner, 2004) and emotional reactions (e.g., Gross & D'Ambrosio, 2004), and much of the psychological framing research is rooted in prospect theory (Kahneman & Tversky,

1979). These generalizations are not meant to rule out exceptions or imply that framing research in other disciplines never crosses these lines (for an exception, see Walsh, 2004). Rather, these general observations are my attempt to clarify how the communication approach is a bit unusual in comparison.

Now I will describe how the communication treatment of frames and framing differs from these disciplines. The communication perspective on framing is unusual in that the definitions emphasize the relevance of framing at different levels of communication analysis. This emphasis necessitates the integration of various theoretical mechanisms and methodological strategies to accomplish the end goal of “elaborating and understanding complex communication processes” (D’Angelo, 2002, p. 883). In other words, the conceptualization of frames and framing in our field calls for researchers to examine different levels of analysis; as a result, communication scholars must integrate theoretical ideas from other disciplines and utilize multiple methods to effectively understand the process of framing. First, individuals’ cognitive processes at the psychological level or intraindividual level (Chaffee & Berger, 1987) are important to communication scholars because without this, we could not understand audience frames (e.g., Sotirovic, 2000). Second, the interactions of people with one another at the interpersonal level (Chaffee & Berger, 1987) provide a clearer picture of how citizens use frames in conversation (e.g., Brewer, 2002). Thirdly, by examining the network or organizational level (Chaffee & Berger, 1987), communication researchers can observe how various groups contribute to the framing process (e.g., Andsager, 2000). Finally, the macroscopic societal processes (Chaffee & Berger, 1987) are also important for

communication researchers to consider, as these processes help us to understand media frames (e.g., Akhavan-Majid & Ramaprasad, 1998).

What, then, are the implications of this for communication science? If the levels of communication analysis discussed above are necessary for communication science, as Chaffee and Berger (1987) would suggest, then the implication is that communication science is advanced by the conceptualization of frames and framing in a way that requires communication researchers to study framing at different levels of analysis. Similarly, communication science is strengthened when scholars use multiple methods and concepts from disciplines such as psychology, sociology, and political science to understand and study framing. This implication is articulated much more eloquently by D'Angelo (2002) in his response to Entman's (1993) call for a single paradigm of news framing research. Rather than viewing the multidisciplinary nature of framing research in the communication field as an identity crisis, D'Angelo (2002) contends that communication as a discipline is benefited by a multiparadigmatic approach to framing research. He discusses three different paradigms that are evident in the communication field in general and in framing research specifically: 1) the cognitive paradigm (characterized by negotiation), 2) the critical paradigm (characterized by domination), and 3) the constructionist paradigm (characterized by co-optation). "A cursory look at most framing studies [within communication] shows that researchers synthesize ideas from different paradigms" (D'Angelo, 2002, p. 878). What benefits communication science, according to D'Angelo (2002), is the fact that these different paradigms contribute uniquely to our knowledge of the framing process. Put simply, framing as a complex process is best understood by multiple perspectives, each one important to a different aspect of the

process. “Thus, communication scholars should reconsider the role of paradigms in enabling complex processes to be brought to light. Paradigms are vital to scientific discovery ... .The mission of the communication discipline is well served by what they [framing researchers] have so far accomplished” (D’Angelo, 2002, p. 883).

### *Framing as Distinct from Agenda-Setting and Media Priming*

Now that I have discussed how the concepts of frames and framing have come to be used in the discipline of communication, it is important to consider how framing relates to and yet is distinct from both agenda-setting and media priming. Unfortunately, scholars in the communication field disagree about the relationships among framing, priming, and agenda-setting. As Kosicki (2001) notes, agenda-setting has often been treated as encompassing “almost any type of research question involving public issues and media. ... However, agenda-setting is more properly viewed as a single type of media effects hypothesis that concerns the connection between the news media and public issues” (pp. 64-65). The first view of agenda-setting would imply that priming and framing are best viewed as specific instances of agenda-setting. The second view requires that agenda-setting be seen as more distinct from and not necessarily encompassing priming and framing. Some researchers even take an additional view of the theoretical perspectives and suggest that agenda-setting can be understood as a type of priming or framing (e.g., Price & Tewksbury, 1997), while others examine framing as a second-level of agenda-setting (e.g., Jasperson, Shah, Watts, Faber, & Fan, 1998). Taking the position advocated by Kosicki (1993, 2001) and others (e.g., Scheufele, 2000a) which views framing as a theoretical perspective distinct from both agenda-setting and priming, I will describe both agenda-setting and media priming, highlight the

ways in which these research areas are distinct from yet complimentary to framing, and identify the unique ideas that the framing perspective brings to the field that would not be present if agenda-setting or media priming were used as the theoretical basis for a study.

For many years, the study of public issues in communication was the study of agenda-setting. In fact, agenda-setting is a research tradition that has existed since the early 1970s (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Kosicki, 1993). Chaffee's (1977) review of mass communication research discusses agenda-setting as a prominent theoretical perspective, and agenda-setting is still recognized for its importance to the discipline (e.g., Rubin and Haridakis, 2000). Agenda-setting research began at a time when many in the communication field wanted to "break away" from the limited effects perspective of media that had dominated the field since the late 1940s; however, agenda-setting was not intended to return media effects research to the "magic bullet" perspective either (Kosicki, 1993). Rather, the goal was to consider media as not "telling people what to think" but "telling them what to think about" (Cohen, 1963, as cited in Kosicki, 1993, p. 103).

Traditionally, agenda-setting has been the study of how the media's coverage of certain issues affects what people think are the most important issues: this is known as public agenda-setting (Kosicki, 1993; Rubin and Haridakis, 2000). McCombs and Shaw (1977) state that not only do people learn factual information about public affairs from the media, but also they learn how much importance to attach to a topic based on the emphasis placed on it. In other words, we can observe public agenda setting when the issues portrayed in the media are the same issues that people identify as being important.

Thus the time that the media spend telling a news story, or the amount of space devoted to an issue in a newspaper, or the rank order in which topics are covered in the news (e.g., order of stories in a television newscasts; front-page vs. back-page stories in a newspaper), or the fact that some stories are covered in the news and some are not—all of these things can give citizens the perception that certain issues are the most important ones. Not surprisingly, researchers often examine agenda-setting from this traditional perspective. One recent example of public agenda-setting research explores the effect of online news coverage on electronic bulletin board (EBB) discussions and provides support for an agenda-setting effect in three of the four issues that were examined (Roberts, Wanta, & Dzewo, 2002).

In addition to this traditional perspective, both Kosicki (1993) and Rubin and Haridakis (2000) discuss two other areas of agenda-setting research that are often overlooked: policy agenda-setting and media agenda-setting. Policy agenda-setting research examines the influences that affect the issues that elected officials (such as the President) choose to emphasize, whereas media agenda-setting considers the processes that affect media coverage. The three models of agenda building as proposed by Cobb, Ross, and Ross (1976) suggest different ways in which issues reach the agenda and serve as an illustration of the importance of both policy agenda-setting and media agenda-setting to the agenda-setting research tradition. While the agenda-setting model in general is not without criticisms (e.g. Kosicki, 1993), agenda-setting continues to be a useful perspective in mass media effects research (Rubin and Haridakis, 2000).

In contrast, the media priming hypothesis suggests that the media's selection of what news to cover and what to ignore can affect how people make judgments about their

political leaders and other political issues (Iyengar & Kinder, 1997). According to Price and Tewksbury (1997), “*priming* refers to the tendency of audience members to evaluate their political leaders on the basis of those particular events and issues given attention in recent news reports” (p. 175). For example, Pan and Kosicki (1997) utilize the media priming perspective to examine former President George Bush’s job approval ratings from August of 1990 to November 1992 and find that public evaluations of the President were affected positively by the predominance of news stories about the Gulf War and then negatively when news coverage turned to the economy. To clarify, media priming does not suggest that the news media are “telling” people that President Bush is doing a good job because we are winning the Gulf War, or that President Bush is doing a bad job because we are experiencing economic difficulties. Instead, the intense media coverage of the Gulf War keeps that topic salient in someone’s mind to the point that when he or she is asked to make a judgment about how well the President is doing his job, the success of the Gulf War in essence is interpreted as an indicator of the President’s success in carrying out his duties. As a result, people evaluate the President more positively than they would have if they had not been exposed to media coverage of the Gulf War.

The media priming hypothesis is generally supported by both experimental and survey data (Roskos-Ewoldsen, Roskos-Ewoldsen, & Carpentier, 2002). In fact, Pan and Kosicki’s (1997) study stands alongside countless other researchers who have examined the relationship between news coverage of issues and citizens’ evaluations of the president (e.g., Iyengar & Kinder, 1997; Krosnick & Brannon, 1993; Krosnick & Kinder, 1990; Miller & Krosnick, 1996; Miller & Krosnick, 1997; Valentino, 1999). The



underlying premise of media priming research in this context is that “by calling attention to some matters while ignoring others, news media may alter the standards by which the president is evaluated” (Miller & Krosnick, 1996, p. 81). Thus while public agenda-setting suggests that when the news media cover an issue, it gives the public a sense that the issue is important, media priming occurs when people consider issues recently covered by the media in making evaluations of political leaders and other public concerns.

Not only are agenda-setting and media priming distinct from one another, but also framing stands in contrast to both. Agenda-setting and media priming are concerned with “what” is covered in the media: the topics that are reported and the prevalence or prominence of those topics (Price & Tewksbury, 1997; Pan & Kosicki, 2004). Neither of these theoretical perspectives have anything to say about “how” an issue is presented: whether the coverage is positive or negative, whether the story blames individuals or institutions for a problem, etc. (Price & Tewksbury, 1997; Pan & Kosicki, 2004). Scheufele (2000a) explains this in somewhat different, theoretical terms, identifying salience as the premises of agenda-setting and priming and attribution as the premises of framing. Both agenda-setting and media priming examine to what extent media pay attention to any given issue, while framing deals with the nature of the coverage that an issue receives. As Kosicki (2001) asserts, “Framing, in contrast, is a conceptual framework for examining the details of how issues are conceptualized in public discourse as highly contested matters over which there is often considerable disagreement” (p. 18).

While the conceptual distinction among these theoretical perspectives is extremely important, I do not want to minimize the complimentary nature of these areas

of research, especially in light of the fact that framing is clearly related to how much media attention an issue receives. According to Nisbet, Brossard, and Kroepsch (2003), “If an interest can control media attention to an issue, then it has succeeded in controlling the media and public agenda. Moreover, when an issue does appear in the media, if interests can define their stand as well as the alternatives available for discussion, then they have ‘framed’ the situation in more winnable terms, delimiting the arguments the opposition can make and screening them off from participation” (p. 38). To a great degree, the amount of attention the media (and hence the public) pays to an issue can even depend on how the issue is framed or defined. For example, the study by Rogers, Dearing, and Chang (1991) examines the media coverage of AIDS over four “eras.” In the initial era, AIDS was framed or defined as a gay issue and received little to no media coverage whereas in the science era, the AIDS issue was redefined to suggest that it could be spread through household contact, resulting in a slight increase in coverage. During the human era, media coverage increased even more as the media humanized the gay side of the issue (e.g., Rock Hudson) and addressed the potential for hemophiliacs to contract AIDS via blood transfusions (e.g., Ryan White). The last era, the political era, experienced the most coverage of AIDS as the government could no longer ignore the AIDS issue.

Another example of the relationship between issue attention and issue definition can be seen in Rochefort and Cobb’s (1994) research on problem definition, “[t]he name policy researchers have given to this process of characterizing problems in the political arena” (pp. 3-4). According to this perspective, how problems are defined constrains or determines the kinds of solutions that are offered and accepted as remedies to problems.

Rocheffort and Cobb (1994) argue that how problems are defined has implications for agenda-setting by determining which problems become important. Similarly, one might also see a connection between framing and problem definition in light of Entman's (1993) definition of framing as being essentially the process of defining problems. In fact, according to Hilgartner and Bosk (1988), defining a problem involves both calling attention to "conditions" and framing problems in a certain way (p. 57).

An understanding of the relationship between issue attention and issue definition has broader implications, beyond the research setting. If a strategic actor recognizes that issues are often competing for attention in the public sphere (Hilgartner & Bosk, 1988) and that attention to any given issue naturally waxes and wanes (Downs, 1972), then he or she will attempt to define an issue in a way that captures attention and in a way that will compel others to support the issue. For example, if a strategic actor feels left out of the policy process, the actor might expand the scope of the debate by attempting to get their message across to others and by winning arguments (Pan & Kosicki, 2001). "Framing an issue is therefore a strategic means to attract more supporters, to mobilize collective actions, to expand actors' realm of influences, and to increase their chances of winning" (Pan & Kosicki, 2001, p. 40). Thus it is imperative that a strategic actor articulates his or her version of the controversy by framing the issue in a way that engages the interest of the public and the media.

With both the compatibility and the distinctions among agenda-setting, media priming, and framing in mind, I will conclude by identifying several ideas that the framing perspective brings to the field that would not be present if agenda-setting or media priming were used as the theoretical basis for a study. I think that the best way to

illustrate the unique contributions of framing is to give examples from the academic literature. One well-known study by Entman (1991) examines the framing of international news by comparing two similar events as covered in *Newsweek* and *Time*. In 1983, the Soviets shot down a Korean Air Line plane (with American passengers, including a Congress-person) flying over Soviet air space; both magazines framed this incident as intentional murder. However, several years later when the U.S. shot down an Iran Air plane over the Persian Gulf, the same magazines framed this new incident as an unintentional tragedy. This could be evidence for an anticommunist frame in the U.S. media. If agenda-setting or media priming were the only theoretical perspectives available to communication scholars in studying public issues, the media coverage of these two incidents would not tell us very much in this instance, only that media attention was given to each of these events. Maybe more media attention was given in the case when Americans were killed as opposed to when Americans did the killing (and indeed, this was the case), but this is only part of the story. Framing helps us to understand *how* the coverage was different and stimulates us to think about the potential *consequences* of media coverage with these characteristics.

Parisi's (1998) examination of a series of articles run in the *New York Times* about life in Harlem serves as another illustration of the importance of the framing perspective. Parisi (1998) describes frames of African Americans as being personalized, frames which because of the focus on individuals serve to reinforce stereotypes rather than alter them. In fact, Parisi (1998) contends that this "personalized framing represents only a sophisticated new form of the denigrating discourse of race in the press" (p. 247). If Parisi (1998) had only agenda-setting to guide this research, then the most important

aspect would be the existence of media coverage about life in Harlem. From the public agenda-setting perspective, Parisi (1998) could have examined the degree to which people in New York felt that Harlem issues are important. If utilizing media priming, Parisi (1998) could have explored whether the coverage of this issue had an effect on the way that people evaluated the mayor of New York. But only the framing perspective can identify the *nature* of these articles and can help us consider how media coverage sometimes serves to *reinforce* racial stereotypes.

### *Media Frames*

In this section, I will describe and explain several conceptualizations for examining media frames. Iyengar (1991) provides one of the most well-known and cited discussions of two media frames, episodic framing and thematic framing. According to Iyengar (1991), all news comes from a perspective, or a frame. Episodic framing results from a focus on individual events and individual people and can produce beliefs that individuals are responsible for social problems. On the other hand, thematic framing points to social trends and various characteristics of a broader issue or group and can produce beliefs that society or the government is responsible for societal problems. In Iyengar's (1991) view, television news is primarily episodic while newspapers and magazines are primarily thematic. After studying television news coverage of crime and terrorism, Iyengar's (1991) results support the idea that television news contains more episodic frames than thematic frames and that these frames have different effects; however, since Iyengar (1991) did not specifically examine newspapers and magazines, it is impossible to conclude from his study whether there is a difference in frames depending on the media source.

Building on Iyengar (1991) and a number of other researchers, Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) provide an additional conceptualization of media frames. They examine five different media frames in European television and print news: the conflict frame, the human interest frame, the economic consequence frame, the morality frame, and the responsibility frame (episodic vs. thematic). The results of this study indicate that the attribution of responsibility frame is used most frequently, followed by the conflict, economic consequence, human interest, and morality frames. In framing responsibility, episodic frames are more common than thematic; however, these episodic frames containing stories about individuals and isolated events indicate that the government is responsible for the problems in society, which directly contradicts Iyengar's (1991) view. Semetko and Valkenburg's (2000) study also demonstrates that there is a difference between television and print media in their use of frames and that there is a difference in framing depending on the topic.

A third example comes from Akhavan-Majid and Ramaprasad (1998) who explore the relationship between media frames and three types of ideology by comparing American and Chinese newspaper coverage of the Fourth UN Conference on Women and the Non-Governmental Organizations Forum held in Beijing. Specifically, these researchers focus on three types of ideology that they hypothesized would affect the media frames. The first one, dominant ideology, "refers to views and ideas shared by the majority of people in a given society" (Akhavan-Majid and Ramaprasad, 1998, p. 134). An example of differing dominant ideologies for the U.S. and China might be anti-communism vs. communism. Secondly, elite ideology "may be defined as the particular ideology or policy orientation on the part of the government or the administration in

power at any given point in time” (p. 134). Usually the dominant ideology and the elite ideology are the same, but not always. Lastly, journalistic ideology is formed by “media routines and occupational values” and might be in line with either the dominant or the elite ideology or both (p. 134). The results of this study confirm the influence of these ideologies on the media frames in both the U.S. and China. In particular, this study finds that U.S. coverage is characterized by anticommunist and antifeminist frames.

A longitudinal study by Callaghan and Schnell (2001) examines news coverage of the gun control debate from 1988 to 1996. The overall frame from this time period is a “pro-control” frame. These researchers find little influence of interest groups and political leaders on the media frames and more influence of public opinion as well as the media’s own frames on news discussion of gun control. Because this finding stands in contrast with the sometimes observed and assumed influence of elite ideology on media frames (e.g., Akhavan-Majid and Ramaprasad, 1998), Callaghan and Schnell (2001) explain that “previous findings are based on foreign policy coverage” (p. 201). This points to the possibility that there is a fundamental difference between media frames of international vs. domestic issues.

Strategy frames and issue frames (e.g., Rhee, 1997; Valentino, Beckmann, & Buhr, 2001) are also a common way to conceptualize media frames. Strategy coverage occurs when news media emphasize things such as who is ahead in the polls and how politicians are running their campaigns, whereas issue coverage occurs when news media focus on “policy issues, problems, and solutions” (Rhee, 1997, p. 30). Explaining strategy frames in a bit more detail, Cappella and Jamieson (1996) summarize Jamieson’s earlier work (*Dirty Politics*, 1992) by stating that “strategy coverage is marked by several

features: (1) winning and losing as the chief concern; (2) the language of wars, games, and competition; (3) mention of performers, critics, and audience (voters); (4) emphasis on performance, style, and perception of the candidate; and (5) great weight being given to polls and position in evaluating campaigns and candidates” (p. 74).

Another frame, distinct from strategy frames yet sharing conceptual similarities is the conflict frame, one of the five frames mentioned previously in Semetko and Valkenburg’s (2000) work. According to DeVreese (2004), “The conflict frame follows from the observation that news about politics and the economy is often framed in terms of disagreement between, for example, individuals or political parties. In this way of framing the news, controversy and diverging aspects between conflicting parties are emphasized. ... Research on news values points to the importance of conflict. The presence of conflict is consistently listed as an essential criterion for a news story to make it into the news, not only because it ‘sells,’ but also to meet professional standards of balanced reporting” (pp. 36, 38). Conflict is not only an important news criteria (Bennett, 2001; Graber, 1993b; Patterson, 1993), but also is the most commonly used news frame (Smith, 1997; Zillmann, Chen, Knobloch, & Callison, 2004). In describing the conflict frame, Zillmann et al. (2004) state, “Clashes between opposing forces—be they warring nations, political parties, bickering neighbors, or jealous lovers—have been the stuff that made news through the ages” (p. 60).

Fiorina (2005) discusses the prevalence of media content that portrays the United States as “polarized” and divided, a nation of blue states and red states. “Conflict, of course, is high in news value. Disagreement, division, polarization, battles, and war make good copy. ... Thus, the concept of a culture war fits well with the news sense of



journalists who cover American politics” (pp. 2-3). Fiorina (2005) suggests that the mass media describes this culture war as being fought between two polarized groups of people, those who identify with the Democratic Party and those who identify with the Republican Party. Thus the United States becomes a map of blue states, where there are slightly more people who identify with the Democratic Party; red states, where there are slightly more people who identify with the Republican Party; and states where there is a fierce battle going on because the number of people identifying with the Democratic Party and the number of people identifying with the Republican Party are essentially equal. In this context, the culture war is being waged between two polar opposite political groups who are trying to come out ahead.

He argues that, while there have been cultural conflicts throughout American history, the media and other political elites are framing the current political situation as a culture war that is both significant and unique in its intensity. Giving numerous examples from newspapers, magazines, television, scholarly journals, books, and research organizations during 2000-2004, Fiorina (2005) claims that there is a “prevailing media frame of a polarized nation” (p. 41). His main conclusion is that the polarization frame within the media suggests a sharply divided nation of people who are polar opposites on the political spectrum but that in actuality, most Americans are closely divided, meaning that the majority of people are in the ideological middle with relatively few people holding extreme political views. In fact, he suggests that it is really politicians and the elite members of the political parties who are indeed polarized. Fiorina’s (2005) concern is that the way in which the media seems to be distorting the realities of the political landscape via the polarization frame could have negative effects

on citizens' understanding of themselves and others, essentially creating a self-fulfilling prophecy. While the framing literature concerning strategy frames and conflict frames shares similar themes, no one has yet systematically examined this polarization frame beyond Fiorina's (2005) examples to determine its prevalence or its potential effects on public opinion.

### *Framing and Audience Effects*

The empirical results of framing studies have much to tell us in terms of audience effects. Throughout the following section, I will review some of the key findings of this literature, highlighting both the theory and method. I will first discuss studies that use one method in examining audience effects and then present several examples of framing research that utilizes multiple methods. The majority of framing studies that examine audience effects rely on experimental methods (e.g., Davis, 1995; Druckman & Nelson, 2003; Kinder & Sanders, 1996; McLeod & Detenber, 1999; Rhee, 1997; Shah, Domke, & Wackman, 1996; Shen, 2004a, 2004b). Experimental research suggests that media frames can affect audience perceptions of specific groups. For example, basing their view of framing effects on the ideas of cognitive accessibility and the protest paradigm, McLeod and Detenber (1999) examine the relationship between level of status quo support in television news about protesters and various perceptions of the protesters and related issues. Specifically, these researchers use "three television news stories on anarchist protests in downtown Minneapolis" to represent "three levels of status quo support: low, medium, and high" (p. 9). Their results "show that the degree of status quo support in news stories produces framing effects on protest-specific perceptions: criticism of and identification with the protesters, support for their expressive rights, criticism of

the police, perceived effectiveness of and public support for the protest, and the newsworthiness of the protest” (p. 16). McLeod and Detenber (1999) continue by explaining the following: “Although each story was critical of the protesters, subtle differences in the level of status quo support in the news stories had a substantial linear impact on the exposure groups. The linear patterns suggest that the stories were activating cognitions consistent with the level of status quo support in the story . . . .” (p. 16). These results suggest that the media frames used to characterize various groups do shape the way in which others view those groups.

In another experiment, Davis (1995) goes beyond just examining views toward groups of people to how media frames potentially affect behavior such as recycling; however, his theoretical approach to framing draws on Kahneman and Tversky (1984) and employs what is known as gain-framed or loss-framed messages. Gain-framed messages focus attention on the positive outcomes of a specific behavior or course of action whereas loss-framed messages emphasize the negative outcomes of a specific behavior or course of action. The results show that “framing effects do influence response to an environmental communication and subsequent intentions to participate in environmentally-responsible behaviors” (Davis, 1995, p. 295). If media frames can influence audience intentions to behave in a certain way, there is a strong possibility that, under certain circumstances, media frames can affect behavior.

Rhee (1997) discusses the effects of frames used in campaign news coverage. Arguing from what he refers to as a “social cognitive” perspective, Rhee (1997) defines media frames as “a combination of the textual features operating at the initial level of news interpretation where the textual features set limits on the use of knowledge” (p. 28).

Examples of these textual features include headlines, audio-visual components, and other symbols or phrases that can call attention to or away from elements of a news story.

Rhee (1997) uses two types of media coverage to examine framing effects: strategy coverage and issue coverage. Using data from two experiments, Rhee (1997) reports that frames from the print media affected the audience frames, but the broadcast media frames did not have an effect. In other words, individuals who read an article characterized by strategy coverage used strategy-related concepts when describing the campaign.

Similarly, “[t]hose who received issue-framed print news tended to characterize the campaign using issue-oriented concepts” (p. 42). However, no framing effect is demonstrated for broadcast news, indicating that print and television news may have different framing effects. Just as in Davis’ (1995) research, this study does not measure behavior directly, but describing a campaign in a research setting could indicate a potential for future communication with others (which is an action).

Also using the concepts of strategy and issue frames in an experiment, Valentino, et al. (2001) examine framing effects on political participation and confidence in government. Valentino et al. (2001) find further support for the effect of media frames on audience frames. Beyond this, media frames can influence political participation and confidence in government under certain conditions. The strategy frame can decrease “[i]ntention to vote and civic duty” of those who are non-partisan or who are not college graduates (p. 363). Similarly, those who do not identify with a major party also have lower levels of trust in government and do not find elections to be very important.

Similar to the aforementioned studies, Brewer’s (2002) exploration of the media frames used in covering gay rights demonstrates framing effects on subsequent

discussion in an experimental context. More specifically, Brewer (2002) considers the differences in the effects of equality and morality frames, basing his expectations on two different “psychological explanations for why exposure to value frames in mass media coverage might influence how people link their values to issues” (p. 304): an accessibility explanation and a salience explanation. The results indicate that people exposed to equality frames are more likely to use similar equality frames when describing gay rights and that those exposed to morality frames will tend to use morality frames. However, people use these frames to both support and question the media frame. For example, individuals exposed to news opposing gay rights from a morality frame tend to not only use moral terms in opposing gay rights but also use moral reasons for supporting gay rights. This finding suggests that people are not mere victims of media frames but can use them in ways that are consistent with their own pre-existing views. Druckman’s (2001) research also supports this view: “Citizens appear to consciously weigh the considerations suggested by elite frames, compare these considerations to their predispositions and information, and contemplate about the source of the frame” (p. 246). In other words, people are not blind, deaf, and dumb; they are “competent” and “well-reasoned.” According to Ryan and Wentworth (1999), this very idea is evident in Durkheim’s perspective on individual autonomy and society: “Thus, the media become more powerful, but their effects become less fundamentally predictable because they are acting on and being interpreted in a less organized, stable, and coherent environment. It would be Durkheim’s view that individuals are not the mere dupes of the symbol makers” (p. 30).

Druckman and Nelson's (2003) experiment offers similar evidence for a more complicated relationship between elite frames in the media and audience effects. Arguing from a view of framing effects as working through memory-based processes (in contrast with on-line processing), Druckman and Nelson (2003) find that the effects of elite frames are moderated by political discussions that occur in a cross-cutting (i.e., diverse or heterogeneous) context. However, conversations in a more homogeneous context did not moderate the effects of elite frames.

In summary, experimental framing research suggests that media frames can affect audience perceptions of specific groups (e.g., McLeod & Detenber, 1999), can potentially affect future behavior (e.g., Davis, 1995; Rhee, 1997), and can influence political participation and trust in government under certain conditions (Valentino et al., 2001). However, the effects of media frames on audiences greatly depend on pre-existing beliefs, attitudes, and values (e.g., Brewer, 2002) as well as the extent to which people engage in political discussions in heterogeneous contexts (e.g., Druckman & Nelson, 2003).

While experiments seem to be the method of choice for framing effect studies, communication scholars have also made significant contributions to the literature using other methods. A discussion of the empirical results of framing studies would not be complete without including Gamson's (1992) work with focus groups. Compelled by the study of social movements, Gamson (1992) grounds his work theoretically on the concept of collective action frames. Specifically, Gamson (1992) and colleagues interviewed 188 individuals in the context of 37 different focus groups. The facilitators in these focus groups took a more hands-off approach than is normally the case in most focus group

settings and would intervene when necessary only if “a discussion got off the track” (Gamson, 1992, p. 17). Some of the central themes in Gamson’s (1992) analysis reinforce the idea that individuals are more active and more intelligent than some might expect. In addition, “people negotiate with media messages in complicated ways that vary from issue to issue” (Gamson, 1992, p. 4). Essentially, interpersonal discussion has a strong influence on people’s understanding of issues. As Brewer (2002) notes, “Gamson’s (1992) focus group research suggests that citizens use the frames they find in media coverage not only to form their own issue opinions but also to engage in conversation about issues” (p. 314). Gamson’s (1992) results stress that media is “an important tool or resource that people have available, in varying degrees, to help them make sense of issues in the news. When they use elements from media discourse to make a conversational point on an issue, we are directly observing a media effect” (p. 180). In addition, Gamson (1992) suggests that media effects on public opinion are conditional, depending on the strategy used by an individual to understand in issue, and proposes three potential strategies: cultural, personal, and integrated. Those who use cultural strategies are most affected by media frames because they have opinions that fluctuate while those with personal strategies are least affected by media frames and instead rely on their own experiences to reach an opinion. Finally, those who use integrated strategies are influenced by media frames “to the degree that these frames are consistent with their popular wisdom and experiential knowledge” (pp. 180-181).

There are fewer examples of survey research on framing effects, but two will be discussed specifically here, both of which address effects on public opinion and both of which utilize survey research along with content analysis of media. Extending research

on episodic and thematic frames, Iyengar and Simon (1993) study the effects of news coverage of the Persian Gulf on public opinion about military conflict. Their theoretical perspective primarily relies on attributions of responsibility to explain framing effects. This longitudinal study utilizes Gallup polls, media content analysis, and NES survey data to demonstrate that “exposure to episodic framing of the crisis increased viewers’ support for a military resolution to the conflict” (p. 381). To the extent that news is characterized by episodic or thematic frames, this finding suggests a number of important implications for public opinion.

Not only do media frames affect public opinion about international issues, but also media frames may influence how people view other domestic policies, such as welfare. Arguing from a “constructionist approach to framing, which emphasizes the meanings that people construct in their social interactions to develop an understanding of the world” (p. 273), Sotirovic (2000) uses survey data and media content analysis to demonstrate that “patterns of individuals’ entertainment and news media use affect frames that people adopt in thinking about an important public issue” (p. 287). In particular, use of various media such as television news, public affairs programs, television entertainment, and national newspapers are associated with different audience frames about welfare.

In addition to the aforementioned—focus groups, survey research, and content analysis—participant observation is another method that can serve as an alternative to experiments in framing effects research. Using a multi-method approach, Walsh (2004) includes a content analysis of news, secondary analysis of national survey data (including the 1990 Citizen Participation Study and the 1996 American National Election Study),



and self-administered questionnaires in her research and spent about three years (1997-2000 and part of January 2001) doing participant observation of the “Old Timers,” “a group of retired, white, middle-class to upper-middle-class (objectively defined) men” (p. 4) who gathered daily at a local corner store, as well as two others groups who met within that same store. The second group included retired, white and African-American blue-collar workers, while the third group included white, middle-class men and women. Walsh also did “fieldwork with a group of elderly women who meet in a craft guild at an Ann Arbor church and, for a short time, with a group of homeless people who gathered during a breakfast program” (p. 4). While Walsh (2004) does not specifically label it as such, it seems that her theoretical approach to framing is primarily a constructionist one: “Although elite-driven frames induce some categories to be more accessible than others, what these categories mean differs significantly across people in different social locations” (p. 32). The focus of Walsh’s (2004) analysis is political discussion, but she suggests a number of implications for framing research and public opinion: “[elite] framing in terms of social groups is persuasive not because social groups exist out there but because individuals have developed identities and anti-identities with categories of people” (p. 174). In other words, Walsh (2004) finds that media frames can account for some changes in public opinion through a “top-down” process but that “bottom-up” processes are also at work. Therefore, understanding these “bottom-up” processes is essential to both framing and public opinion research.

Taking all of these empirical findings into consideration, it is clear that framing research has benefited from multiple methods and multiple theoretical explanations of framing effects. Media frames can and do influence audience opinions (e.g., Iyengar &

Simon, 1993) and their understanding of public issues (e.g., Gamson, 1992; Sotirovic, 2000), for example, but this influence is often conditional (e.g., Gamson, 1992; Druckman & Nelson, 2003; Walsh, 2004).

### *Media Framing in the 2004 Election*

In this study, I consider specifically the polarization frame, both its prevalence and its potential influence on political efficacy and mobilization in the context of the 2004 election. I will not attempt to determine whether or not Fiorina's ultimate conclusion is true or false: whether the polarization frame is a distortion of reality because it is politicians and party elites who are polarized, not average Americans. Instead, I merely want to test his assertions that 1) the polarization frame is a prevalent frame and 2) that the polarization frame may have less than desirable consequences. I test these assertions by examining the existence of the polarization frame in the context of the 2004 election and by considering its potential consequences for citizens.

Using Fiorina's (2005) work on the polarization frame and Walsh's (2004) work on the role of social or group-based identity in the media framing process, I suggest how the polarization frame may interact with partisan identity in affecting citizens' political efficacy and mobilization. As Walsh (2004) explains, "[elite] framing in terms of social groups is persuasive not because social groups exist out there but because individuals have developed identities and anti-identities with categories of people" (p. 174). In other words, some people identify with specific social groups and others do not. Within a context such as the 2004 election, identifying with either the Democratic Party or the Republican Party and not identifying with either the Democratic Party or the Republican Party could be considered one of the salient identities or anti-identities that citizens have

developed. As a result, when the media frames the election in terms that emphasize partisan identity such as the polarization frame does, those who have a stronger identification with one of the major political parties may have higher levels of political efficacy and mobilization than those who have a weaker identity or an anti-identity with the major political parties. Thus I approach media framing as a process that often has a conditional influence in a context such as the 2004 Presidential election where group identity in the form of party identification is salient.

Because of the implications of Walsh's (2004) research as previously discussed, I do not merely explore media's role in framing as a "top down" process. Rather, I investigate the role of two, key "bottom up" processes also at work within the context of the 2004 election: political discussion and opinion leadership.

#### Political Discussion

The study of political discussion within the communication field is not a recent phenomenon (e.g., Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955; Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet, 1944); however, there seems to be a growing interest in the concept, as can be illustrated by the number of political discussion studies over the past decade or so (e.g., Bennett, Flickinger, & Rhine, 2000; Conover, Searing, & Crewe, 2002; Gamson, 1992; Kennamer, 1990; Scheufele, 1999, 2000, 2002; Straits, 1991; Walsh, 2004). Much like any other concept in communication, scholars offer a variety of conceptual definitions for political discussion (e.g., Straits, 1991), which is often referred to as political talk (e.g., Scheufele, 2000; Shevchenko, 2001) or political conversation (e.g., Eliasoph, 2000; Kim, Wyatt, & Katz, 1999). While the majority of studies primarily focus on the individual or psychological-level attributes of political discussion (e.g., Atkin, 1972; Eveland, 2004;

Kenamer, 1990; Koch, 1994; Scheufele, 2000), it is important to explicate a conceptualization of political discussion at the sociological level and at the cognitive level as well. In this section, I will first discuss the relevance of political discussion to public opinion, political behavior, and political learning across levels of analysis. In doing so, I will address important features such as the social and institutional context of discussion, the social composition of discussion partners, the nature of discussion, and the linkages between talk and forms of media use. Then, I will suggest how research on political talk can be usefully examined through the sociological lenses of power and inequality; social control and integration; and social change. Finally, I will briefly summarize the empirical results of various political discussion studies that demonstrate how political discussion is related to both media and political participation.

#### *What is Political Discussion and Why Study It?*

At the macro or sociological level, we should consider why political discussion is important to a democratic society and why political discussion is important to study. A number of scholars have suggested reasons why political discussion is important to democracy, the most famous one being de Toqueville's (1835/1963) idea that political discussion among citizens is the soul of democracy. Since that time, some have agreed (e.g., Bennett et al., 2000; Kim et al., 1999; Scheufele, 2002)), disagreed (e.g., Schudson, 1997), or have taken a position somewhere in between the two (e.g., Conover et al., 2002; Eliasoph, 1998; Walsh, 2004). The positions that scholars take on this issue seem to be related to their conceptions of deliberation and/or a deliberative democracy (e.g., Fishkin, 1999). Before I discuss the specific reasons that are given for why political discussion is

important to a democratic society, I would first like to briefly compare the concept of deliberation with the concept of political discussion.

Scheufele (1999) defines deliberation as the “rational exchange of ideas or arguments among citizens” (p. 25). Conover et al. (2002) suggest that most conceptualizations of deliberation include the idea of citizens expressing logical reasons for their views and dialoguing with one another in a way that moves them toward decisions about public issues. They also describe three more characteristics of deliberation: 1) it is public; 2) it is free (meaning not regulated or controlled by a powerful few); and 3) it promotes equality. But, as Conover et al. (2002) maintain, deliberation as an “ideal speech situation” (Habermas, 1982), where “all arguments are answered in the context of free and equal discussion” (Fishkin, 1995, p. 40), is not an empirical reality for most people. Yes, there are deliberative polls (e.g., Fishkin, 1999) and deliberative forums (e.g., Gastil & Dillard, 1999), but most people do not have an opportunity to engage in these kinds of opportunities (Conover et al., 2002).

Political discussion, on the other hand, occurs quite frequently among citizens (Wyatt, Katz, & Kim, 2000), but it occurs in more informal contexts such as sitting around in a corner store with friends (Walsh, 2004) or talking casually with family members (Straits, 1991). Thus people involved in this type of discussion do not always express their ideas in the form of logical arguments (Conover et al., 2002) and do not usually attempt to make decisions about important social issues (Walsh, 2004) but instead share their thoughts with one another (De Boer & Velthuisen, 2001) and help one another understand political issues (Gamson, 1992). Political discussions are often not public (Eliasoph, 1998) and are often not equal (Conover et al., 2002).

This is not to suggest that political discussion and deliberation do not share anything in common conceptually. For example, Wyatt, Katz, and Kim (2000) propose that political conversation includes “informal deliberation or spirited argumentation as well as casual discussion” (p. 72). Despite the ongoing debate over the relationship between deliberation and political discussion in which some view the two as different, equivalent, or closely related (Wyatt, Katz, & Kim, 2000), argumentation seems to provide a link between these two concepts. To the extent that political discussion includes the exchange of arguments, it could be contended that deliberation can occur in more informal contexts such as political discussion.

The conceptual distinction between deliberation and political discussion is relevant because some scholars portray political discussion in the context of deliberative democracy (e.g., Kim et al., 1999), suggesting that political discussion has all of the benefits that the normative idea of deliberation supposedly has. I find it essential to keep this in mind when considering the various reasons given for why political discussion is important to a democratic society. One reason given for the importance of political discussion to a democratic society stems from the classical definitions of political participation (Bennett et al., 2000). The logic here is that if a democracy necessitates the participation of citizens and if discussion encourages participation, then discussion, too, is an essential part of a democratic society. Another reason given for the relevance of political discussion to democracy is the idea that political discussions lead to a higher quality of opinions or more informed opinions (Bennett et al., 2000; De Boer & Velthuisen, 2001). Some even think that political discussions enable citizens to be aware of public opinion (De Boer & Velthuisen, 2001). If the political discussions are

occurring in a diverse environment, among citizens with different views, political discussions are said to increase “social awareness,” helping citizens to become more knowledgeable about others’ views and needs (MacKuen, 1990). Similarly, it is suggested that political discussion can increase citizens’ awareness of their civic duties (Bennett et al., 2000).

Unfortunately, the empirical reality does not suggest that all of these normative expectations about political discussion are true, at least not all of the time. Gastil (1992) contends that political discussion is often undemocratic. For example, existing evidence suggests that people most frequently talk to family, friends, and like-minded others (e.g., Bennett et al., 2000; Straits, 1991) in the context of their homes and at work (Wyatt, Katz, & Kim, 2000) and not as often in public places such as civic organizations, houses of worship, and commercial locations (Wyatt, Katz, & Kim, 2000). Talking with personally close, like-minded others in more private contexts is often not very conducive to the democratic ideal of becoming more aware of others’ views and needs (MacKuen, 1990). Citizens do want to understand others, but they prefer not to resort to argument; they like civil, informational discussions as opposed to well-reasoned ones (Conover et al., 2002).

Political discussion often gives people a sense of group identity (Gamson, 1992; Walsh, 2004), but this identity can have less than desirable implications when it serves to isolate “us” from “them,” reinforcing racial stereotypes and other prejudices (Walsh, 2004). Also, political institutions and cultural norms can sometimes inhibit discussion (Conover et al., 2002). As Eliasoph (1998) asserts, “When good manners prevent publicly minded speech in the potential contexts of the public sphere, the public sphere

has a problem” (p. 7). Finally, there is reason to believe that the two prevailing models of democracy, liberal individualism and civic republicanism, are not entirely adequate conceptualizations of democracy as it relates to political discussion. In contrast to liberal individualism, “when people talk causally, their social identities are central to the interaction” (Walsh, 2004, p. 8). And in contrast to civic republicanism, “definitions of community are created through the course of interactions” (Walsh, 2004, p. 9).

These empirical realities are the reasons why political discussion is relevant and important as a research endeavor. Even if these discussions do not meet up to all of our normative expectations for what a democratic society should be, political talk does have a number of positive attributes that will be highlighted throughout the rest of this literature review. As Conover et al. (2002) suggest, “private discussions afford citizens the opportunity to discuss political issues in ways that are personally satisfying and less revealing than more public discussions. The value of such private discussions for improving the quality of democracy in a contemporary liberal states is surely a topic that warrants future research” (p. 61).

Now that I have summarized some of the key elements of political discussion conceptualized at the sociological level, I will continue by considering some of the attributes of political discussion at the cognitive or psychological level. First, existing evidence suggests that people who discuss issues with others tend to learn more about politics (Bennett et al., 2000; Kenamer, 1990; Robinson & Levy, 1986b; Scheufele, 2002). However, the political learning that occurs does not always come in the form of political knowledge; rather, political talk is associated with an increased number of cognitive responses, or thoughts (Conover et al., 2002). There are a number of



explanations for how increased political learning is made possible through discussions. One explanation concerns the effect of a heterogeneous discussion network on learning. For example, people who use media more are more likely to engage in political discussions with people who have views different from their own, a heterogeneous context (Kim et al., 1999), and this in turn can increase learning because people are encountering new information in the form of diverse opinions and ideas (MacKuen, 1990). Not only do people learn more about others' views in a heterogeneous network, but also they are challenged to re-evaluate their own views in light of the conflict between their own opinions and others' opinions (McPhee, Smith, & Ferguson, 1963). From a similar perspective, Krassa (1990) argues, "If knowledge is acquired through interactions, then hostile interactions, because they bring together two dissimilar types, are more likely to produce new or novel information" (p. 322). In other words, heterogeneous networks, by their very nature, are more conducive to learning than homogeneous networks because it is more likely that "new information" will be available as a result of the diversity (Krassa, 1990).

Neuman (1986) contends that network heterogeneity "extends the breadth of individuals' political thinking. ... Exposure to the cross-cutting ideas and perspectives . . . may lead them to a more balanced and thought-out approach to politics" (p. 127). Not only does network heterogeneity affect the breadth of political knowledge but also "it extends the depth of people's political thinking (Neuman, 1986, p. 127). This means that individuals are more equipped to understand the news when their social network includes people from a variety of backgrounds representing diverse ideas. Indeed, research

suggests that people in heterogeneous networks tend to learn more about politics than those in more homogeneous networks (Krassa, 1990).

A second attribute of political discussion at the cognitive or psychological level is motivation to use media. Anticipated political discussions with others can serve as a motivation to use media, referred to as communicatory utility (Atkin, 1972). This suggests that political discussions provide people with a legitimate need for selective media use, consistent with the uses and gratifications perspective (e.g., McLeod & Becker, 1974; Rubin & Haridakis, 2000). The motivation to use media that political discussion provides could be one of the reasons that so many studies demonstrate a positive relationship between media use and political discussions (e.g., Bennett et al., 2000; De Boer & Velthuisen, 2001; Kim et al., 1999; Koch, 1994; Scheufele, 1999, 2000; Wyatt, Kim, & Katz, 2000).

Eveland (2004) applies this idea of “anticipated communication” as seen in uses and gratifications literature (McLeod & Becker, 1974) to the context of political discussions as another explanation for why political discussions can increase learning. As Eveland (2004) explains, “individuals expecting to engage in discussion of a political topic will invest more heavily in processing the information upon first being exposed to it because they want to be prepared to engage in later discussion of the information” (p. 7). Thus the need to be prepared can be viewed as the motivation that drives these individuals to turn to media for their political information, information which can greatly increase their chances of competently and intelligently interacting with others.

Thirdly, political discussion can be described as having the cognitive attribute of elaboration. Eveland (2004) suggests another explanation related to the aforementioned

one regarding anticipated communication which he calls the “discussion-generated elaboration explanation.” According to this perspective, people may learn during political discussions because while they are talking, they are forced to process information more carefully. Eveland (2004) finds that, indeed, discussions encourage elaboration of political issues.

A fourth way in which political discussion is relevant at the cognitive level is that they improve an individual’s quality of opinion (Kim et al., 1999; Wyatt, Katz, & Kim, 2000). This could, in part, be due to the fact that political discussions can provide citizens with the tools that they need to articulate their reasons for holding a certain view (Huckfeldt, Mendez, & Osborn, 2004). Doing so can give individuals a sense of personal gratification as a result of engaging in political talk (Conover et al., 2002).

Finally, political discussions can encourage individuals to participate more in politics (Scheufele, 2000; Wyatt, Katz, & Kim, 2000; Wyatt, Kim, & Katz, 2000). This is accomplished because of the mobilizing nature of discussions in getting people to unite in collective action (Gamson, 1992). Within a homogenous discussion network, non-voters are more likely to become voters if they regularly discuss political issues with people who have higher levels of political participation and thus are voting (Pattie & Johnston, 2002). Within a heterogeneous network, however, the opposite can occur. These cross-cutting social networks can discourage political participation (Mutz, 2002) and can encourage ambivalent attitudes (Huckfeldt et al., 2004). It is important to note, however, that while Huckfeldt et. al (2004) found these networks to encourage ambivalent attitudes and decrease campaign interest, they found no evidence that these networks affect voter turnout.

Now that I have discussed the relevance of political talk across levels of analysis, I will suggest how research on political talk can be usefully examined through the sociological lenses of power and inequality; social integration and identity; and social change (cf. McQuail, 2000). To a great degree, these issues compliment one another and are highly related to one another, but I will summarize each one of them specifically as they relate to political discussion.

In terms of power and inequality, political discussion can re-legitimate dominant power structures. Two examples can illustrate this clearly: 1) people tend to rely on media as a source for discussion topics, allowing these discussions to serve as a social control function (Robinson & Levy, 1986b); 2) political discussions are often unequal in that they tend to leave out women and the elderly (Conover et al., 2002). Power and inequality is also a useful lens because discussion can help citizens make sense of political issues (Gamson, 1992) so that they can participate in bottom-up framing processes (Walsh, 2004).

In the context of heterogeneous networks, citizens' conversations serve to limit the effects of elite framing (Druckman & Nelson, 2003). In fact, talk is a form of power, but citizens give up this power when they do not discuss issues publicly (Eliasoph, 1998). Eliasoph (1998) finds that in private group meetings and everyday political discussions, citizens talk about important public concerns related to political issues (e.g., what to do with toxic waste, why toxic waste is such a problem, etc.). However, in public settings such as when being interviewed by the media, citizens speak quite differently—they express only self-interested concerns and they do not express public concerns as they did in more private political discussions. For example, people refer to “my house” or “my

children” when addressing the issue of toxic waste in public. Discussion can empower citizens when they are able to create their own meaning or understanding of issues (Eliasoph, 1998). Citizens can also be empowered when they participate in the political process (Scheufele, 2000; Wyatt, Katz, & Kim, 2000; Wyatt, Kim, & Katz, 2000). They mainly gain an increased sense of efficacy or confidence in their ability to understand political issues and participate in the political process (Gamson, 1992).

Research on political talk can also be usefully examined through the sociological lens of social integration and identity. The context in which these discussions occur often creates an environment where citizens can become aware of their political and social identity (e.g., church, work, school, etc.) (Gamson, 1992; Walsh, 2004). People discuss their experiences with one another and use those experiences as a basis for a “shared subcultural knowledge and popular wisdom” (Gamson, 1992, p. 4). In fact, people’s sense of identity with one another guides how they view and understand political issues (Walsh, 2004). When discussions occur in homogenous networks, people’s sense of identity and belonging can be strengthened; the political talk gives people a sense of “we” (Gamson, 1992; Walsh, 2004). But this identity can be exploited by elites when they use frames that invoke people’s sense of identity with certain groups as a means of social control (Walsh, 2004). Discussing politics with people who have similar views can validate worldviews and opinions (De Boer & Velthuisen, 2001; Straits, 1991). Discussions give citizens a sense about the extent to which others agree or disagree with them; this is a common way for them to assess public opinion (De Boer & Velthuisen, 2001).

In addition, having political conversations is one way that people “talk themselves into” their own feelings and opinions about political issues (Eliasoph, 1998). People also discuss politics to “validate” the information gleaned from news (De Boer & Velthuisen, 2001). When people find that they share similar information via exposure to the media, they are more likely to engage in spirited discussion of those issues (Eveland et al., 2004). On the other hand, discussing politics in a heterogeneous context may challenge people’s identities and values, especially when they find themselves to be in the minority (Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1987).

Finally, social change is also a useful lens through which to examine political discussion. When political talk helps people understand politics (Gamson, 1992) and when citizens are mobilized to participate more in politics (Scheufele, 2000; Wyatt, Katz, & Kim, 2000; Wyatt, Kim, & Katz, 2000), there is potential for social change. For example, Lazarsfeld et al. (1944) found that undecided voters were more likely to have political discussions with others and “were more likely to mention personal influences in explaining how they formed their final vote decision” (p. 151). Similarly, discussing politics with people who are participating politically (i.e. voting) mobilizes non-voters to vote, especially when their discussions occur in a homogeneous context (Pattie & Johnston, 2002). Talking politics with others may make citizens more aware of and concerned about public problems, and this, too, can promote social change when people unite in collective action (Gamson, 1992).

However, discussions often serve to reinforce the status quo (Robinson & Levy, 1986b), which inhibits social change. Discussions can also inhibit social change by increasing levels of apathy and cynicism among citizens (Eliasoph, 1998; Shevchenko,

2001). Mutz's (2002) research suggests that people who interact in cross-cutting (i.e. heterogeneous) networks are less likely to participate in politics. Along with decreased levels of participation, discussion in heterogeneous networks can also encourage ambivalent attitudes (Huckefeldt et al., 2004), which may also inhibit social change. In fact, Eliasoph (1998) argues that citizens "actively" create hegemony.

#### *How is Political Discussion Related to Other Variables?*

Now that some of the issues surrounding the conceptualization of political discussion have been identified, it is important to review some of the relevant research findings that suggest how political discussion is related to other variables.

#### Political Discussion and Media Use

The literature in this area clearly demonstrates a positive relationship between media use and political discussion (e.g., Atkin, 1972; De Boer & Velthuijsen, 2001; Kim et al., 1999; Koch, 1994; Scheufele, 1999; Straits, 1991); however, the direction of this relationship is unclear. Researchers tend to interpret the results in light of their expectations about the direction of the relationship, even if they cannot infer the direction based on their study design. All but one of the above studies interprets this relationship as media use leading to discussion (De Boer & Velthuijsen, 2001; Kim et al., 1999; Koch, 1994; Scheufele, 1999; Straits, 1991). As De Boer and Velthuijsen (2001) suggest, people often discuss the news "to assess whether news has personal relevance" and that to do this they "have to socially validate new information through conversation" (p. 143). The exception to this trend of viewing news use as stimulating discussion is Atkin (1972), who reports two secondary analyses of survey data as well as an experiment that indicate that interpersonal discussion encourages media use. Despite the tendency for

many researchers to suggest that media use is followed by discussion, it is conceivable that the relationship between media use and discussion is bi-directional. In other words, news media use does tend to stimulate discussion, but at the same time, discussions with others may encourage or motivate people to seek information from the news media.

### Political Discussion and Participation

Some of the key concepts in much of the political discussion research include social capital and political participation. Putnam (1995) would argue that an important component of any thriving society is social capital, which is generated by people participating in public or community life. Social capital consists of both social trust and civic engagement (Putnam, 1995). Indicators of social capital would include things such as volunteerism, group membership, etc. In many ways, political participation is closely related to social capital.

La Due Lake and Huckfeldt (1998) “argue that social capital is realized through networks of political communication, thereby enhancing the likelihood that individuals will become politically engaged” (p. 569). In this view, “politically relevant social capital should enhance the likelihood of individual engagement in politics, enabling citizens to become engaged in ways they might otherwise not (La Due Lake & Huckfeldt, 1998, p. 570). Essentially, social capital, by its very nature, should have a positive relationship with political participation, and existing research supports this view (e.g., Smith, 1999). One could also argue that indicators of social capital such as being involved with parents, school, and religious activities (e.g., Smith, 1999) can be interpreted as being interpersonally connected with others. If one is connected to others in this way, a natural outflow or part of this connection would most likely include



political discussion. In fact, research by La Due Lake and Huckfeldt (1998) indicates that political discussion that occurs within social networks increases social capital, which in turn increases political participation. Not only does the aforementioned social capital literature suggest that political discussion is positively related to political participation, but also a number of studies that focus more specifically on political discussion support this relationship (e.g., McLeod et al., 1999b; Scheufele, 1999; Wyatt et al., 2000).

#### *What is the Role of Political Discussion in the 2004 Election?*

Based on the political discussion literature, it is clear that political discussion among citizens is important to consider alongside media framing in the context of the 2004 election because political discussion is an important “bottom up” process at work (Walsh, 2004). Therefore, in this study, I examine specifically how political discussion among family and friends contributed to citizens’ levels of political efficacy and mobilization during the 2004 Presidential election. As Walsh (2004) suggests, “much of political behavior is rooted in social rather than political processes. Social identities are integral to political understanding, yet they are clearly not defined entirely in the political realm... . Instead, an important part of their production is done by ordinary people engaging in ordinary talk” (p. 8). Thus public opinion and various political feelings and behaviors are not determined by elite messages alone and should instead be understood in the context of “socially rooted processes.” From this perspective, “appeals to social group attachments work because members of the mass public are continually doing the work of defining themselves as particular kinds of people” (Walsh, 2004, p. 8).

As Walsh’s (2004) findings suggest, it is likely that political discussions among family and friends during the 2004 election were important for citizens in the ongoing

process of “defining themselves” and others “as particular kinds of people.” In an election context, these discussions may serve to reinforce the extent to which citizens identify themselves as a member of one of the two main political parties or as someone who does not belong to either of those parties. Therefore political discussions may affect political efficacy and mobilization differently depending on the degree of partisan identity that is reinforced in those discussions. In addition to political discussion, I will now address opinion leadership as a distinct yet related “bottom up” process at work in the 2004 election context.

### Opinion Leaders

The opinion leader concept is one that received widespread attention across disciplines for a number of decades following the work of Lazarsfeld and colleagues (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, & McPhee, 1948; Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955; Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet, 1944). In this section, I will first discuss *The People’s Choice*, highlighting two key themes that are important in understanding the opinion leadership concept as well as mass and interpersonal communication literature since that time. Then, I will consider the review opinion leadership literature, highlighting some of the problems associated with the concept. I will conclude this section by emphasizing that it is important to view public opinion as a process and to understand how opinion leaders function in this process today. Opinion leaders may not have the kind of role in today’s society as specified in the two-step flow of communication, but this should not limit their significance to the public opinion process or their perceived relevance as a research concept.

### *The People's Choice*

One classic work in communication literature is *The People's Choice: How the Voter Makes Up His Mind in a Presidential Campaign* by Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet (1944). Using panel survey data from a sample in Erie County, Ohio, during the U.S. presidential campaign of 1940, Lazarsfeld et al. (1944) set out “to discover how and why people decided to vote as they did” (p. 1). Two major themes relating to media effects and interpersonal communication emerge from this work. The first is that the mass media, in the form of a political campaign in this instance, serves to “activate . . . political predispositions” (p. 73). Thus the mass media are not seen primarily as changing people's minds as much as reinforcing their pre-existing beliefs, attitudes, intentions, etc. A second theme is that, while the mass media do exert some influence on people and their voting decisions, interpersonal relationships have a much greater influence. To better understand these two themes and their implications for the opinion leadership literature, a few specifics will be explored.

In the context of a political campaign, Lazarsfeld et al. (1944) suggest that the mass media serve to “activate . . . political predispositions” (p. 73) through three specific functions or effects: activation, reinforcement, and conversion. Activation involves the ability of the media to gain people's interest as the campaign unfolds, to increase media exposure about the campaign among those who have high interest, to encourage selective attention based on political predispositions, and to promote voting in a way that is consistent with the “outlook of their social groups” (p. 83). The second function or effect of media, according to Lazarsfeld et al. (1944) is reinforcement, which involves the ability of the media to “reinforce by validating, orienting, and strengthening the original

decision, by minimizing tendencies toward an internal conflict of opinions, by buttressing some opinions at the expense of others, and by countering possible or actual corrosion of partisan attitudes” (p. 93). Finally, the conversion effect occurs when media are able to sway someone “to vote against their predispositions” (p. 95), but the Lazarsfeld et al. (1944) study suggests that this effect is rare. In fact, when considering the effects of the campaign as a whole, only 8% could be classified as conversion.

Contrasting interpersonal communication and its effect on vote choice with mass media, Lazarsfeld et al. (1944) contend that “personal relationships are potentially more influential for two reasons: their coverage is greater and they have certain psychological advantages over the formal media” (p. 150). One finding they present in support of this view is that more people—usually 10% or more—engaged in political discussions with others than were exposed to campaign media on any given day. In addition, the undecided voters were the ones who were likely to participate in these conversations: “people who made up their minds later in the campaign were more likely to mention personal influences in explaining how they formed their final vote decision” (p. 151).

This led Lazarsfeld et al. (1944) to introduce the idea of the two-step flow of communication where opinion leaders, who are quite interested in the campaign and who participate frequently in political discussions, pass down information from the media to those voters who are less interested, less aware, and often undecided. From this perspective, interpersonal discussions have more influence than campaign media for several reasons: interpersonal conversations are more casual, more flexible, more rewarding, more trustworthy, and more persuasive. These conversations do not necessarily inform people of the issues or change their minds about the issues; rather,

people may simply vote “for the personal friend, not the candidate” (p. 157). “Fully 25% of those who mentioned a personal contact in connection with change of mind failed to give a real issue of the campaign as a reason for the change, but only 5% of those who mentioned the formal media omitted such a reason” (p. 157). Thus despite their acknowledgment that mass media during a political campaign may change someone’s vote, Lazarsfeld et al. (1944) conclude that it is much more likely that interpersonal discussions will accomplish this.

### *The Opinion Leadership Literature*

Opinion leaders were originally seen as “filters or mediators through which the persuasive messages of the mass media had to pass” (Weimann, 1994, p. 5). In fact, Jacoby (1974) emphasizes the conceptual importance of opinion leadership across disciplines such as communication, sociology, social psychology, agricultural economics, and marketing. As Katz (1957) suggests, being an opinion leader involves “who one is,” “what one knows,” and “whom one knows” (p. 73). Thus when opinion leaders talk to others whom they are close to or are similar to, they are likely to influence others to adopt new behaviors (Burt, 1999). Hamilton (1971) considers the dimensionality of the opinion leadership concept by replicating the finding of the Decatur study and finds that opinion leadership consists of two dimensions: 1) one’s own perception of how influential one is and 2) one’s “actual advice giving.” Hamilton refers to these as the “opinion leadership self concept” and the “opinion leadership functional role” (p. 273).

Kingdon (1970) proposes a typology of opinion leadership and suggests that the electorate can be divided into one of 4 types: activist, talker, passive leader, or nonleader. The activist, talker, and passive leader are all seen as different types of opinion leaders

and comprised 29% of his sample. Kingdon observes several differences between leaders and nonleaders: 1) “leaders have attained higher levels of formal education” (p. 258); 2) “leaders are somewhat more likely to be white than nonwhite, male than female” (p. 258); 3) leaders and non-leaders exist across age groups; 4) “leaders are by no means evenly distributed among occupational strata” (p. 258); and 5) “leaders rank higher than nonleaders on measures of political efficacy, interest in the campaign, and concern about the outcome of the election” (p. 258).

Interestingly, opinion leaders get their information from a variety of sources, with a special emphasis on print media, whereas nonleaders get their information primarily from television news (Kingdon, 1970). In a similar study comparing leaders and nonleaders, Levy (1978) finds that opinion leaders and nonleaders do not differ in the frequency of their television news consumption but that they differ in their reason for watching television news. “Public affairs opinion leaders apparently use their television news exposure for cognitive orientation. However, television is not their sole source, and possibly not even their major source, of news” (Levy, 1978, p. 405). Also, in comparing voters who “split” their ticket between parties or change parties between elections with “straight-ticket” voters, a larger percentage of voters who either “split” their ticket or change parties between elections are opinion leaders (Kingdon, 1970). Kingdon (1970) observes that opinion leaders are not stronger partisans than those who are not opinion leaders, but Republicans tend to be opinion leaders more so than Democrats.

In addition to the differences between leaders and non-leaders, Kingdon (1970) notes that the three types of leaders—activists, talkers, and passive leaders—have differences among them. Specifically, activists tend to have the most education and the

highest levels of interest, concern, efficacy, knowledge, and participation. The activists are followed in rank order by the talkers, with moderate levels of these variables, and the passive leaders exhibit the lowest levels of these variables. In addition, Kingdon (1970) finds that activists and talkers tend to be Republican whereas passive leaders and nonleaders tend to be Democrats.

Others have approached opinion leadership from specific contexts. For example, Mathes and Pfetsch (1991) discuss the opinion leader concept as it applies to the media—media opinion leaders. Domke, Garland, Billeaudeau, & Hutcheson (2003) describe opinion leaders as non-governmental experts in a specific area, which suggests that being an opinion leader depends on the context. In fact, Roch (2005) argues that opinion leadership is not simply a specific set of universal personality characteristics but instead is dependent on a particular social context. People occupy different social roles in various contexts. Thus a person who is an opinion leader in one context may not be in another.

Understanding the opinion leadership concept necessitates an understanding of the two-step flow of communication. Many since Lazarsfeld and colleagues (Berelson, et al., 1948; Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955; Lazarsfeld et al., 1944) have attempted to replicate and validate the two-step flow of communication. For example, Troidahl (1966-67) argues that the two-step flow of communication is best understood in the context of effects on attitudes and behavior whereas a one-step flow of communication is best understood in the context of awareness or political learning. Troidahl suggests that balance theory offers an explanation for how and why nonleaders solicit opinions from opinion leaders.

Specifically, Troidahl asserts that when an individual encounters a media message that is inconsistent with his or her own beliefs, that individual is likely to seek balance by talking to an opinion leader. The opinion leader may help to change the individual's mind or may counter the viewpoint presented in the mass media. Because nonleaders tend to talk to opinion leaders with whom they are similar, most likely individuals' original attitudes will be reinforced unless the opinion leader has changed his or her own attitudes or behavior as a result of the same media message and other expert opinion leaders. After testing these assertions, Troidahl found little to no support, and in many cases, the results for opinion leaders and nonleaders (followers) were the reverse of what he expected.

Robinson (1976) also proposes a revised understanding of the two-step flow and echoes the idea that information and influence are two separate issues. From this perspective, the mass media serves an information function whereas the opinion leaders serve an influential function. "*Opinion leaders* have been thought to differ from other people, either because of their social position or status or by virtue of their greater interest in the topic at hand. Because of more highly developed belief systems, they might monitor the mass media more closely and more purposively than nonleaders" (p. 307). Robinson lists 6 linkages that are important to the flow of communication in an election campaign, only 2 of which were contained in the original two-step flow concept (#1 and #3): 1) media to opinion leader, 2) media to the less attentive, 3) opinion leaders to the less attentive, 4) opinion leaders to opinion leaders, 5) less attentive to opinion leaders, and 6) less attentive to less attentive. Robinson (1976) finds that when media and



interpersonal communication are compared, interpersonal influence is greater, but people are more frequently exposed to media, not interpersonal influence.

Burt (1999) explains the two-step flow of communication in terms of “two distinct network mechanisms”: one mechanism whereby opinion leaders get information from one group to another and a second mechanism whereby opinion leaders can influence others within a group to adopt a behavior. In an agenda-setting study, Brosius and Weimann (1996) examine 4 different models of the two-step flow of communication and obtain weak support for all of them suggesting that the flow of communication is more complex than just a two-step flow among the public, opinion leaders, the media.

In addition to the attempts to replicate and validate the two-step flow of communication, scholars have measured opinion leadership in a variety of ways. Kingdon (1970) uses 2 questions to measure opinion leadership: one asks respondents whether they tried to persuade others to vote for a specific candidate or party; the other asks respondents whether others solicited their opinion concerning a political candidate or party. However, Silk (1971) discusses the issues that surround the measurement of opinion leadership using self-identification scales. Silk notes that most studies use only two items (much like Kingdon’s measures) to operationalize opinion leadership and that this poses reliability concerns. Silk’s research examines whether a 6-item opinion leadership scale by Rogers is plagued with response set problems. Silk concludes by stating that identifying opinion leaders is clearly a problem.

In Robinson’s (1976) study, opinion leadership was measured by asking respondents “whether they had ‘talked with any persons and tried to show them why they should vote for one of the parties or candidates’” (p. 310). In addition, Robinson (1976)

measured opinion receiving by asking respondents whether or not someone had talked to them about voting for a specific candidate or party. It is interesting to note that “opinion receiving was associated with a 7 percent higher voter turnout” (p. 316).

According to Jacoby (1974), opinion leadership is a key concept for understanding interpersonal influence and is measured using one of three different techniques. “The *self-designating* approach asks the individual to indicate how much of an opinion leader he perceives himself to be. In the *sociometric* approach, all members of a given group are asked to identify those group members considered most influential with respect to the object or idea under consideration. The *key informant* approach involves first identifying a limited number of people assumed to be knowledgeable regarding the patterns of influence within a group, and then asking them to identify the influentials within that group” (p. 82).

In examining the construct validity of these measurement techniques, Jacoby (1974) finds convergent validity for these techniques but mixed results for discriminant validity. Overall, results from two out of four of the fraternity groups he used in this study established construct validity for the opinion leadership measures, and Jacoby (1974) concludes that his study supports the observational (as opposed to experimental) construct validity of the opinion leadership concept.

#### *Public Opinion as a Process*

Since the idea of public opinion as a process has been articulated by numerous scholars (Allport, 1937; Bryce, 1888; Crespi, 1997; Davison, 1957; Foote & Hart, 1953; Glynn, 1997, 2004; Noelle-Neumann, 1973, 1993; Price & Roberts, 1987), reviewing several of these process models will help to illustrate the importance of opinion leaders in

this process. Davison (1957) describes the public opinion formation process as first involving the formation of an issue. Davison (1957) maintains that little is known about this part of the process but that “in order to survive and spread it [the issue] must find one or more human groupings hospitable to it” (p. 94). The next stage Davison (1957) suggests is one in which leaders begin to “emerge” and have influence on others, “beyond . . . those he knows personally” (p. 95). In this stage, the issue is simplified, generalized, and communicated to members of different groups via mass or interpersonal communication channels. It must then be accepted by “a substantial number of individuals” (p. 97) in order for public opinion to develop.

The third stage occurs as people begin discussing the issue with others, aware that “many other people are thinking and talking about the same thing” (pp. 97-98). Ultimately, many will form their own opinion on the issue, an opinion having been “shaped” by both prior attitudes and the attitudes of others. The next stage is what Davison (1957) refers to as “personal sampling” (p. 99), where people try to gather clues about how “members of other groups” (p. 99) view the issue and then make generalizations about expected behavior based on those clues. In the final stage of Davison’s (1957) model, people make adjustments to their own attitudes, opinion, and behavior based on their perceptions of others’ views. Also, those who until this point had no interest in the issue (and hence really do not know much about the issue) tend to “adopt the opinions of . . . others” (p. 101). This part of the process has similarities to Zaller (1992) and his view of those with low levels of political awareness.

Davison’s (1957) model of communication appears to be the basis for many perspectives on the public opinion process, including work by Noelle-Neumann (1993),

Price and Roberts (1987) and Crespi (1997) (see Glynn, 2004). Davison's model suggests that an issue develops momentum when an idea is communicated from one person to another. Hence public opinion does not just appear, but rather is something that takes root in discussion among citizens and is therefore strongly influenced by group opinions and opinion leaders (Glynn, 2004).

Another process model, proposed by Price and Roberts (1987), describes public opinion as "a complex function of interactive communication at multiple levels" (p.785). This process model emphasizes inter-level relations among individuals, groups, and organizations playing different roles over time. Groups are especially important to this process because people often learn about an issue via group interaction. People also find out from the expressed opinions within these group interactions about which positions are acceptable and "appropriate" and which positions are not. Groups play an important role in mobilizing people and communities, drawing the attention of local media to an issue, and defining certain issues for the public (Tichenor, Donohue, & Olien, 1980).

In a figure of this public opinion process, Price and Roberts (1987) present their model as a cyclical one where an event triggers a response by reporters, who in turn "represent ongoing events and political actions to the interested public" (p. 806). At this point, the media enter the process again as polltakers, who then take a "mediated" version of the public's view to political actors. The political actors are then represented by the reporters, and the cycle continues. One of the key ideas within this model is that both political actors and the interested public rely on perceptions, either perceptions of public opinion or perceptions of public affairs, to guide their behavior. A second key idea is that

both political actors and the interested public rely on the media to relay their messages to one another.

Crespi's (1997) process model suggests that public opinion develops at different levels or stages. At the individual level, attitudes and worldview are influential in the opinion formation process. Secondly, these individual opinions are communicated via interpersonal discussions and the mass media, resulting in collective opinions. Finally, these opinions are legitimized and/or instituted within the political realm by institutions or actors. Crespi (1997) contends that these levels of development illustrate how the public opinion process is a "multidimensional, integrated, ongoing phenomenon" (p. 4).

Despite the earliest studies addressing opinion leadership (e.g., Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955; Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet, 1944), the subsequent hundreds of studies that were conducted in the 1960s and 1970s (as cited in Weimann, 1994), and the importance of opinion leaders in the process of public opinion (e.g., Davison, 1957; Glynn, 2004; Price & Roberts, 1987), relatively little empirical work has been done to further our understanding of this concept within the last twenty years (e.g., Black, 1982; Leonard-Barton, 1985; Noelle-Neumann, 1985) and even fewer research examples exist within the last ten years (e.g., Chan & Misra, 1990; Hellevik & Bjorklund, 1991; Trepte & Scherer, 2004).

Lazarsfeld et al. (1944) introduced the idea of the two-step flow of communication where opinion leaders, who were quite interested in the campaign and who participated frequently in political discussions, passed down information from the media to those voters who were less interested, less aware, and often undecided. While our current understanding of political discussions and the flow of communications would

suggest that the two-step flow is in actually a “multi-source,” “multi-step flow” (Weimann, 1994), the importance of considering the concept of opinion leadership in public opinion studies today is not diminished. If anything, more recent findings in the communication field indicate a more complex process than a mere two-step flow that is yet to be completely understood.

We know that opinion leaders are prevalent in society across gender, age, and class; we know that opinion leaders tend to have high levels of participation in their communities; we know that people interpersonally “close” to these opinion leaders consider them to be “experts”; we know that opinion leaders tend to have high levels of exposure to the mass media (Weimann, 1994). However, there are many things we still do not know about opinion leaders (Trepte & Scherer, 2004). For instance, do opinion leaders adopt media frames when discussing political issues with others? If so, what are the effects of this political discussion for public opinion? Are the effects of media frames even greater when opinion leaders utilize these frames in their political discussions? If not, are people able to reject media frames more readily after discussing political issues with opinion leaders who have potentially “re-framed” the issues? These and perhaps many more similar questions could be addressed if more research examined opinion leadership and its role in the public opinion process.

#### *Opinion Leaders in the 2004 Election*

Just as past elections have provided contexts for researchers to examine opinion leadership, the 2004 election also provides such an opportunity. I will examine the role of two different aspects of opinion leadership as a “bottom up” process. First, I will consider how contact with an opinion leader, referred to as opinion receiving by

Robinson (1976), may have boosted levels of political efficacy and mobilization during the election. As Robison's (1976) research suggests, contact with an opinion leader is "associated with a 7 percent higher voter turnout" (p. 316). No doubt both political parties were counting on such a positive outcome in the 2004 election as well. This is demonstrated by the sheer number of volunteers that both parties recruited for door-to-door campaigning efforts across the United States, but especially within the battleground states. In many respects, these volunteer citizens, who devoted their time, energy, and efforts to encouraging others to vote could be considered some of the key opinion leaders during the 2004 election campaign. This is not to suggest that these citizens are necessarily "opinion leaders" in other contexts or in all contexts, but as the opinion leadership literature suggests, being an opinion leader is not simply having universal personality characteristics but instead is dependent on a particular social context (Domke et al., 2003; Roch, 2005).

However, as Walsh's (2004) work on group identity suggests, the discussions that these volunteers had with citizens as they went door-to-door can be understood as interactions producing and reinforcing social identities. It is through these "casual interactions" that "people accomplish the civically desirable work of connecting themselves to politics. . . . But the dark side of this interaction . . . clarifies attachments to specific social groups and reinforces the boundaries of 'us' and 'them,' producing collective understandings that are not necessarily democratic goods" (Walsh, 2004, p. 8). As with political discussion among family and friends, it is possible that those who had contact with the volunteer opinion leaders may have responded differently to those interactions based on the strength of their partisan identity. Thus contact with an opinion

leader may be seen as affecting political efficacy and mobilization differently depending on the degree of partisan identity that is reinforced in those interactions.

A second aspect of opinion leadership that I explore in this study is the social function of being an opinion leader in a context such as the 2004 election. This opinion leadership functional role has to do with one's "actual advice giving" (Hamilton, 1971) or the extent to which one attempts to persuade others to vote for a particular party or candidate (Kingdon, 1970; Robinson, 1976). It is likely that some of the campaign volunteers attempted to serve this function in going door-to-door. However, the campaign volunteers were clearly not the only opinion leaders of the 2004 election that may have attempted to talk others into voting for a specific candidate or party. Thus it is important to consider other opinion leaders who served this functional role during the election much like the opinion leaders that Lazarsfeld et al. (1944) studied. Doing so will help to validate prior work on opinion leadership in a current political context.

The significance of opinion leaders to the public opinion process as well as their importance to the "bottom up" processes of the 2004 election in the ongoing work of defining self and others as "particular kinds of people" and as belonging to specific social groups, such as political parties, necessitate that this study include analyses of both contact with an opinion leader and being an opinion leader during the election. Along with media and political discussion, I will identify how opinion leadership affects political efficacy and mobilization and how this effect may differ based on the strength of partisan identity.



## Social Identity Theory

In light of the recurring emphasis throughout the literature reviewed thus far on the importance of social identities, the key concepts of social identity theory need to be described in more detail. Social identity theory, developed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner (1979), contains three central components (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) that will be important to this study. The first component of social identity theory is categorization. Individuals categorize things and people to help them understand the world around them. For example, individuals may use categories such as students vs. parents, conservatives vs. liberals, upper class vs. middle class, or good vs. bad. The theory suggests that individuals categorize their social environment in order to determine to which group or groups they belong. In this way, an individual defines appropriate behavior on the basis of the group. Tajfel and Turner (1986) explain that “any behavior displayed by one or more actors toward one or more others” shows themselves and others “as belonging to different social categories” (p.15). When individuals divide people and things into various categories, they are essentially assigning perceived rules of behavior to each group. For example, in assigning oneself or another person to a category labeled “conservative,” one may expect a behavior such as “unwilling to change.”

Once categorization has occurred, an individual is then able to identify himself or herself in relation to each category (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). This is the second component, known as identification. Positive group identification occurs if one perceives himself or herself as a part of a particular category, whereas negative or no group identification is found with a category to which one does not personally assign himself or herself. Tajfel and Turner (1986) suggest that this identification often varies by situation,

and that individuals may consider themselves part of a particular category in one situation but not in another. An example of this might be in the category of tolerance. An individual may consider himself or herself in the tolerant category for the abortion issue but not for the issue of gay rights. The idea is that in a given situation, at a given point in time, an individual identifies positively or negatively with certain categories of people.

Ultimately, this results in comparing oneself with similar others, the third component of social identity theory. In addition, Tajfel and Turner (1986) argue that individuals strive for a positive self-concept and strive to maintain a positive social identity by comparing their social group with others. One example of this is trying to gain self-esteem from being a high school athlete by positively contrasting one's athleticism with negative impressions of those not involved in high school athletics. Thus in order to maintain the positive self-concept of being athletic, one simply compares himself or herself to an athletic individual, thus enhancing one's own self-esteem. Social identity theory is very useful conceptually in thinking about the sociological lens of social identity and integration. It helps to explain the division of "us" vs. "them" and the political consequences these divisions can have for a society (Walsh, 2004).

#### Political Efficacy and Mobilization

Interwoven throughout the literature reviewed thus far are several key concepts that need to be specifically addressed: political efficacy (an attitude or set of opinions) and mobilization (behaviors such as political participation and voting). I will first review literature relating to political efficacy before discussing mobilization.

### *Political Efficacy*

According to Campbell, Gurin, and Miller (1954), political efficacy is “the feeling that individual political action does have, or can have, an impact upon the political process, i.e., that it is worth while to perform one’s civic duties” (p. 187). Political efficacy has been described as having two dimensions: internal political efficacy, which involves believing in “oneself as effective”; and external political efficacy, which involves believing that “the government is responsive” to one’s actions (Abramson, 1983, p. 141). Political efficacy’s two dimensions are not unlike Bandura’s (1986) definition of the concept of self-efficacy, which “combines beliefs about two aspects of personal behavior: (a) belief that a person can perform a specific task successfully, and (b) belief that if well performed, the task yields positive consequences” (Hofstetter, Zuniga, & Dozier, 2001, p. 62). In fact, self-efficacy is regarded by learning theorists as the key to motivating or changing behavior (Hofstetter et al., 2001). Some communication scholars even use the more general term efficacy interchangeably with the term political efficacy (Pinkleton, Austin, & Fortman, 1998). Tan (1981) describes political efficacy in the following way:

Conceptually, political efficacy can be divided into three components: as a norm, as a psychological feeling and as a form of behavior. As a norm, political efficacy is expressed in the expectation that citizens should participate actively and effectively in politics. As a form of behavior, it is manifested in citizens’ activities aimed at influencing the course of political events in their society. And as a psychological disposition, political efficacy is the feeling that an individual citizen can have an impact on the political process (p. 136).

This study along with the bulk of the political efficacy literature focuses on this third component, what Tan (1981) calls the “psychological disposition.” Abramson (1983) suggests that while much of the research on feelings of political efficacy treats the concept as unidimensional, the evidence throughout the literature points to “two distinct dimensions,” internal political efficacy and external political efficacy (p. 144). Four of the original items used by Campbell et al. (1954) that have been most frequently used to measure political efficacy even reflect this two-dimensional nature (Abramson, 1983). For example, the following items are known to reflect feelings of internal political efficacy: “Sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me can’t really understand what’s going on” and “Voting is the only way that people like me can have any say about how the government runs things” (Abramson, 1983, p. 135). External political efficacy, on the other hand, has been successfully measured by the following two survey items: “I don’t think public officials care much what people like me think” and “People like me don’t have any say about what the government does” (p. 136).

Burkhalter, Gastil, and Kelshaw (2002) argue that deliberation increases citizens’ sense of political efficacy. While the review of political discussion literature emphasized the conceptual distinction between deliberation and political discussion, there is still evidence that political discussion in more everyday contexts can and does achieve some of the same pro-social benefits such as increased sense of political efficacy or personal satisfaction (Conover et al., 2002). In addition, mass media is associated with increased political efficacy (Miller & Reese, 1982; Pinkleton et al., 1998). Both mass and interpersonal communication have been found to increase self-efficacy, which is closely tied to political efficacy (Hofstetter et al., 2001).

While there is evidence that “feelings of political efficacy may be altered by events” such as an election campaign (Abramson, 1983), political efficacy also predicts voter turnout and other political participation activities (Johnson & Kaye, 2003; McLeod, Scheufele, & Moy, 1999a; Steel, Pierce, & Lovrich, 1998; Verba et al., 1995). Thus political efficacy in this study will be defined as both feelings of personal effectiveness (internal efficacy) and feelings of government responsiveness (external efficacy) and will be treated as both a dependent and independent variable in separate statistical analyses (c.f., Nisbet & Scheufele, 2004).

#### *Mobilization: Political Participation and Voter Turnout*

One could argue that the purpose of any election campaign, including the 2004 election, is to mobilize citizens. The concept of mobilization in this study, which will include both voter turnout and traditional forms of political participation, is equivalent to the “institutionalized” participation as discussed in McLeod et al. (1999a). Specifically, political participation has been defined as “activity that has the intent or effect of influencing government action—either directly by affecting the making or implementation of public policy or indirectly by influencing the selection of people who make these policies” (Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995, p. 38). Scheufele, Nisbet, and Brossard (2003) suggest that this definition points to the importance of participation being “voluntary” as opposed to “obligatory,” going beyond just paying attention to political matters, and taking action in order to influence “a public official or institution” (p. 302).

Communication, including mass media and political discussions, is vital for political participation to occur. “Through communication, citizens acquire information

about issues and problems in the community and learn of opportunities and way to participate. Closely related to the first function of information dissemination, media or interpersonal forms of communication may mobilize individuals to local political participation” (McLeod et al., 1999a, pp. 316-317). In fact, numerous studies indicate that both media and discussion relate to and serve as predictors of political participation (Chaffee & Kanihan, 1997; Kim et al., 1999; McLeod et al., 1999b; Scheufele, 2000, 2002; Scheufele et al., 2003; Scheufele, Nisbet, Brossard, & Nisbet, 2004).

In this study, political participation will include activities such as writing a letter to an official; participating in a protest; donating money to a political candidate, party, or campaign; going to a political rally in support of a candidate; working on behalf of a political party or candidate; placing a sign endorsing a political party or candidate in one’s yard; and other such activities (c.f., McLeod et al., 1999a; Scheufele et al., 2003; Verba et al., 1995).

Voting, on the other hand, while often viewed as one form of political participation (McLeod et al., 1999a), will be treated as a related but distinct concept in this study because it is considered to be “the least intensive and individually demanding activity” as compared to other forms of political participation (Scheufele et al., 2003). Straits (1990) emphasizes the important role of social context, specifically discussion between spouses, in predicting voter turnout. Brynin and Newton (2003) discuss the importance of media, specifically newspapers, in voter turnout, and find that media effects on voter turnout sometimes depend on party identification. Much like other forms of political participation, various forms of mass and interpersonal communication are important predictors of voter turnout (Beaudoin & Thorson, 2004; Berelson et al., 1954;

Johnson & Kaye, 2003; Lazarsfeld et al., 1944; Pattie & Johnston, 2002; Valentino et al., 2001).

While the tendency is for people to over-report voter turnout in survey research, such as the National Election Studies, there is evidence that this “does not bias the effects of related turnout predictors” that are important in social scientific studies of participation and thus data on voter turnout such as the NES provides “are an accurate standard for assessing electoral participation research” (Cassel, 2004, p. 107).

Other Concepts

### *Party Identification*

Party identification is relevant to each of the key aspects of this study, including media framing, political discussion, opinion leadership, social identity, and political efficacy and mobilization. “Party identification . . . is the *attitude* of considering oneself a Republican, Democrat, or whatever–party attachment–as opposed to being an official party member or even voting for the party’s candidates” (Glynn, Herbst, O’Keefe, & Shapiro, 1999, p. 255). Party identification has also been defined as a stable partisan predisposition toward a political party, which begins early in life as a result of political socialization and increases in strength throughout the life course (Cambell, Converse, Miller, & Stokes, 1960). This traditional approach, as set forth by Michigan researchers (Campbell et al., 1960), views party identification as unidimensional in nature, ranging from strong Republican to strong Democrat, with Independent being in between as a neutral party position. A number of studies have demonstrated the relative stability of party identification over time (e.g. Gilens, 2001).

While the term party identification is frequently used interchangeably or in connection with the term political ideology (e.g. McGraw, Fischle, & Stenner, 2000), some scholars would argue that party identification (e.g., Republican, Independent, or Democrat) and political ideology (e.g., conservative, moderate, or liberal) are distinct concepts. For some people, political ideology may seem more abstract, and thus these people have a hard time identifying or demonstrating a consistent political ideology in surveys (e.g. Converse, 1964).

#### *Campaign Intensity: Battleground States*

Abramowitz and Segal (1992) discuss the concept of campaign intensity as it relates to election campaigns. While their study of senate elections is a different context than the Presidential election of 2004, campaign intensity as they describe it can be a useful way to view the 2004 election. Specifically, Abramowitz and Segal (1992) suggest that the closer an election is between two candidates, the greater the campaign intensity will be in that state or district. They found overall that people living in locations with “contested races turned out at a slightly higher rate than those living” in locations with “uncontested races” (p. 31). Applied to the context of the 2004 election, this suggests that citizens living in those states designated as “battleground states,” where the race between Bush and Kerry was especially close, most likely experienced greater campaign intensity than those living in non-battleground states. This increased campaign intensity may have mobilized more people in the battleground states to participate and vote in the election.

While there are no studies of the 2004 election comparing the campaign intensity between battleground states and non-battleground states, there are two other relevant



ways of determining that campaign intensity within the battlegrounds may have been an important factor. In *The Two Americas*, Greenberg (2004) lays out details for a strategic plan to win the 2004 election that calls for saving resources in some areas and spending them in others. Indeed, both campaigns tended to adopt this strategy by spending the most advertising dollars in the battleground states (“The Great Ad Wars of 2004,” 2004). The door-to-door campaign efforts were also concentrated within the battleground states. This is the context in which someone from New York would have to e-mail a friend in Ohio to find out more about what is going on with the election campaigns (G. Kosicki, personal communication, April 4, 2005).

Because there is evidence of the importance of campaign intensity in elections and because the battleground states in the 2004 election seemed to experience greater campaign intensity, battleground state will be an important control variable in this study. Based on advertising information for the “final barrage” of the campaign as described in the Wisconsin Advertising Project, there are 17 states that will be included as battleground states in this study: Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Ohio, West Virginia, Michigan, Wisconsin, Iowa, Minnesota, Colorado, New Mexico, Nevada, Oregon, Washington, and Florida (“The Great Ad Wars of 2004,” 2004). While the “list” of battleground states changed throughout the course of the campaign, these 17 states were more often than not included in those lists. It is also within these states that the political parties spent their campaign advertising dollars during the “final barrage” of the campaign (“The Great Ad Wars of 2004,” 2004).

### *Education*

Education, or highest level achieved in school, is a key concept throughout the academic literature because of its relationship with so many other concepts of interest. For example, researchers consistently find a significant correlation between education and knowledge, specifically public affairs knowledge (Eveland, 2001). In fact, education is viewed as a key predictor of news interest which in turn encourages news media use (McDonald, Sietman, & Li, 2004). Education is not only important to public affairs knowledge, news use and interest but also is important in the process of public opinion. Those with higher levels of education are more likely to hold opinions than those with less education (Gimpel & Walpert, 1996). People are also more likely to express their opinions when they have more education (Scheufele, 1999). Opinion leaders tend to have higher levels of education than non-leaders (Kingdon, 1970). In addition, education is known to be positively related to frequency of political discussion (Scheufele, 2000); thus the more education one has, the more frequently one talks to others about political issues.

### *Gender*

While it is not the focus of my research, gender is an important concept to include in this study because of the documented effect that one's gender sometimes has on a number of outcome variables. For example, some studies have found women to be ideologically more liberal than men (e.g. Jennings & Stoker, 2001) and as more frequently supportive of Democratic candidates (Glynn et al., 1999). "Women are in general less supportive of wars and capital punishment and more supportive of gun control than men are" (Glynn et al., 1999, p. 235). Gender is sometimes a significant

predictor of opinions in framing studies (Iyengar & Simon, 1993); men and women may respond to media frames very differently (Sotirovic, 2000).

In addition to sometimes affecting opinions, gender is often a significant predictor of campaign knowledge; specifically, men may know more about the campaign (Kenamer, 1990) Men may also have higher levels of overall political knowledge (Eveland, 2004), and men sometimes feel freer than women to discuss various political issues (Wyatt, Kim, & Katz, 2000). Of course, this does not mean that individual men and women are not diverse in their political opinions or knowledge levels. Rather, the gender gap seems to exist in certain contexts but not all contexts, which suggests that differences in opinion by gender should not be ignored. Such differences may have real political consequences.

### *Age*

Another concept that has proven to be significant at times in measuring opinions is age (Knauper, 1999). Age and age effects are concerned with how an individual's age may vary their responses and produce effects accordingly. People of different ages sometimes respond to particular media frames in unique ways (Sotirovic, 2000). Age also significantly affects overall political knowledge in a logical way: older people know more than younger people, and older people are more likely to elaborate on news content (Eveland, 2004). Not surprisingly, older people are less likely to express their opinions (Scheufele, 1999). Older people sometimes discuss political issues more frequently than younger people (Straits, 1990); however, younger people often discuss specific issues more frequently than older people (Kim, Wyatt, & Katz, 1999; Wyatt, Kim, & Katz, 2000).

## *Race*

Over the years, research concerning an individual's race or racial background and the differences between and among races have centered around whether one is black or white, at least in the context of many Western studies (e.g. Wright, 1978). Fortunately, research on race has expanded to include more than just black-white comparisons (e.g. Krivo, 1995). Nonetheless, racial differences in opinion continue to be the most pronounced between black and white Americans.

Critical issues of race invoke the ongoing tensions in basic American values, such as equality of opportunity, equality of result, and faith in due process and other democratic procedures. . . . [N]o other demographic groups in America have more different opinions than blacks and whites (Glynn et al., 1999, p. 232).

People of various races may differ in how media frames affect their opinions (Iyengar & Simon, 1993). Race is sometimes a key factor in the type of political participation individuals choose (Wyatt, Kim, & Katz, 2000). An individual's race can even affect the frequency with which that person engages in political discussions (Straits, 1990).

## *Income*

Income relates to and serves as an important determinant of other concepts such as standard of living, socioeconomic status, and even education while still remaining distinct from other concepts (e.g. Gaziano, 1997; Hero in Robinson, Rusk, & Head, 1969). Difference in income levels sometimes explains different responses to media frames (Sotirovic, 2000), and people with higher levels of income tend to discuss politics more frequently (Scheufele, 2000). Income is positively related to overall political knowledge as well as candidate issue stance knowledge (Eveland, 2004). In fact,

socioeconomic status, often used interchangeably with income, has been shown to have a strong, direct effect on public affairs knowledge (McLeod & Perse, 1994).

### Relationships among Concepts

#### *Framing as a Process*

In the framing literature reviewed in this study, there is much evidence that framing is a complex, social process (D'Angelo, 2002). As such, reducing the study of framing to the identification of "story topics, attributes, or issue positions" trivializes the process and misses some of the key elements affecting the process (Carragee & Roefs, 2004, p. 219). Viewing framing "as a social process remains consistent with Goffman's emphasis (1974) on framing's role in meaning construction (Carragee & Roefs, 2004, p. 228). It could be argued, then, that framing is best studied as "a dynamic process over time" (Chyi & McCombs, 2004, p. 22). As Pan and Kosicki (2001) suggest, "framing is a multifaceted process in which influences travel in different directions" (p. 47).

As previously mentioned in the review of literature, Walsh (2004) discusses media framing as a "top-down" process that can only be understood alongside other "bottom-up" social processes. This approach to framing is a perspective that not only allows for the role of media frames in shaping public opinion but also suggests the importance of "bottom up" processes such as political discussion and opinion leaders (Gamson, 1992; Walsh, 2004).

#### *The Context*

The Presidential election of 2004 provides an opportunity to examine the convergence of media framing, political discussion, and opinion leadership processes at work. First, the dominant media frames of the election are important for understanding

the “top-down” processes of framing. More specifically, if Fiorina’s (2005) analysis of the culture war is correct and the polarization frame was prominent in news media coverage of the Presidential election, this polarization frame may have had a strong impact on public opinion, ultimately affecting both political efficacy and mobilization. Generally speaking, media is perceived to mobilize citizens to participate politically and turnout to vote. For example, in a study comparing a rural and urban community, Beaudoin and Thorson (2004) find that in both communities media use has both a direct and indirect positive effect on voter turnout.

More specifically, there is evidence that media frames are related to political efficacy and mobilization. Research by Shah, Domke, and Wackman (1996) suggests that “media frames influence the issue interpretations and subsequent decision-making strategies of voters” (p. 532). In addition, news frames which focus on political conflict “significantly influence citizens’ thinking about issues and their subsequent candidate choice” (Domke, Shah, & Wackman, 1998, p. 317). We know that media frames can and do influence opinions (e.g., Iyengar & Simon, 1993), and voting in an election may be viewed as the outcome or expression of public opinion (C. Glynn, personal communication, October, 2003). Media frames can also affect audience perceptions of specific groups (e.g., McLeod & Detenber, 1999); in an election context, these groups may be formally organized political parties such as the Democratic Party or the Republican Party. If media frames can potentially affect future behavior (e.g., Davis, 1995; Rhee, 1997), one could argue that this is indirect evidence that media frames can affect whether or not one chooses to participate politically and vote. More direct evidence suggests that media frames can influence political participation (Valentino et

al., 2001), which would include both traditional forms of participation as well as voter turnout, as discussed previously.

However, the effects of media frames on audiences greatly depend on pre-existing beliefs, attitudes, and values (e.g., Brewer, 2002). Shen (2004a) observes that “political ads framed as either character- or issue-oriented had a significant impact on voter cognitions in political evaluations” (p. 133) but also finds that political schemas moderated the effect of frames on voter cognitions. In another framing study, Shen (2004b) finds that “news frames had a significant impact on audiences’ issue interpretations and attitudes” (p. 410). But again, these effects were moderated by individual differences. “Specifically, it was found that individuals with different issue schemas varied significantly in issue interpretations and attitudes. In other words, framing did not have the same effect on all individuals” (Shen, 2004b, p. 410).

This suggests that group identity as a pre-existing belief or attitude may be an important factor in how media frames affect political efficacy and mobilization. As Walsh (2004) suggests, “[elite] framing in terms of social groups is persuasive not because social groups exist out there but because individuals have developed identities and anti-identities with categories of people” (p. 174). Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) is useful here in explaining how media frames such as the polarization frame that reinforce identification with particular social groups, such as the Democratic Party or Republican party, may increase or decrease levels of political efficacy as well as encourage or discourage people from participating and turning out to vote. It helps to explain the division of “us” vs. “them” and the political consequences these polar divisions can have for a society (Walsh, 2004).

While there is yet no systematic evidence for the prevalence of the polarization frame (Fiorina, 2005), one can still make a number of inferences about how this polarization frame may have affected both political efficacy and mobilization in the 2004 election based on the strategy and conflict frame literature. For example, DeVreese (2004) finds that exposure to the conflict frame regarding the enlargement of the European Union affected participants' interpretation of the issue but not their support of the issue. Thus the polarization frame would not likely change a voter's decision about vote choice. Instead, it is likely that the polarization frame may have affected how efficacious they felt and whether or not they chose to participate as well as vote. When an election race is perceived to be close, this increases voter turnout and encourages political participation (Frank, Pitlik, & Wirth, 2004). Since the polarization frame represents the nation as "split down the middle" consisting of blue and red states, an individual that has a predisposition toward one political party or another may be more likely to feel efficacious and be mobilized to participate and vote because the frame invokes a greater sense of identity with their political party.

Similar to the strategy frame, the polarization frame includes "the language of wars, games, and competition" (Cappella & Jamieson, 1996, p. 74) (see Fiorina, 2005). Cappella and Jamieson (1996) find that strategy frames can increase public cynicism toward politics; thus it is possible that polarization frames, too, may have this effect. Beyond increasing cynicism, Valentino et al. (2001) find that the strategy frame can decrease "[i]ntention to vote and civic duty" of those who are non-partisan or who are not college graduates (p. 363). Similarly, those who do not identify with a major party also have lower levels of trust in government and do not find elections to be very important.



This would suggest that while the polarization frames may increase political efficacy, participation, and voter turnout overall through the mechanism of social identity; but for Independents and those who do not identify very closely with either major political party, the polarization frame may actually have no effect on or decrease levels of political efficacy and mobilization.

The first research question in this study designed to establish the prevalence of the polarization frame in media coverage of the 2004 election:

RQ1: How frequently did the media use the polarization frame in coverage of the 2004 election?

This first set of two hypotheses considers how the polarization frame in the media relates to political efficacy and mobilization. Since exposure to the polarization frame cannot be examined directly via survey research, selective attention to campaign stories will be used as an indirect indicator of exposure to the polarization frame. As Zillmann et al.'s (2004) experimental results suggest, conflict frames increase selective attention to a news story when compared to other types of frames. Thus, it is highly likely that those already paying close attention to campaign stories paid even more attention to those stories using the polarization frame because of its emphasis on conflict.

In addition, it is important to examine attention to campaign media overall, across different types of media when considering the impact of the polarization frame. Research suggests that television is the most widely used source of news (Chaffee & Kanihan, 1997; Graber, 1993a; Robinson & Levy, 1986a). In fact, television is used more than newspapers to gain information about national and international issues (Hagen, 1997). In

a number of media reliance studies, there is evidence that more people rely on television news than any other news source (Chaffee & Kanihan, 1997; Culberston & Stempel, 1986). However, as some recent research would suggest, people who are interested in the news get their news from a variety of media sources while those who are not very interested in the news get their news primarily from television (McDonald, Sietman, & Li, 2004). For this reason, it is important for this study to take into account overall attention to media coverage of the campaign instead of focusing on media attention to one specific type of news source.

H1: Attention to media coverage of the campaign is positively related to political efficacy and mobilization.

Because the survey data provides only an indirect link between exposure to the polarization frame and political efficacy and mobilization, any main effect of media attention on political efficacy and mobilization could have a variety of explanations other than a framing effect. Therefore, the best evidence for a possible framing effect due to exposure to the polarization frame would be the hypothesized interaction between media attention and partisan identity on political efficacy and mobilization.

H1a: The relationship between attention to media coverage of the campaign and political efficacy and mobilization is moderated by partisan identity

But media frames represent only one part of the processes at work during the 2004 election. In addition, the political discussions that occurred among citizens during the campaign are important “bottom-up” processes. As framing research suggests, it is

important not to forget the social context of discussions when examining the influence of media frames on public opinion (e.g., Gamson, 1992; Druckman & Nelson, 2003; Walsh, 2004). In a recent study, Hoffman, Glynn, Huges, Sietman, and Thomson (2005) find that political discussion plays a significant role in the public opinion process. Political discussions can affect how people understand issues (Gamson, 1992) and may serve to reinforce the extent to which citizens identify themselves as a member of one of the two main political parties or as someone who does not feel that they belong to either of those parties (Walsh, 2004). Therefore political discussions may affect political efficacy and mobilization differently depending on the degree of partisan identity that is reinforced in those discussions.

This view of a connected, interactive public is evident as early as Katz (1957) and the two-step flow of communication. Understanding society's relationship to media in this way was important in establishing that people do not encounter media in isolation from one another. Rather, they interact with the social world around them which includes media messages as well as the articulated ideas and opinions of others. So, what kind of political discussions are likely to occur?

In Katz's (1957) day, people primarily talked to others like themselves. In addition, "Both of the voting studies indicate the high degree of homogeneity of political opinion among members of the same families, and among co-workers and friends" (Katz, 1957, p. 71). These political discussion networks of like-minded individuals served as "sources of pressure to conform to the group's way of thinking and acting, as well as sources of social support" (Katz, 1957, p. 77).

More recent research suggests that society has not changed very much, at least where political discussion is concerned. For example, people now most frequently talk to family, friends, and like-minded others (e.g., Bennett et al., 2000; Straits, 1991) in the context of their homes and at work (Wyatt, Katz, & Kim, 2000) and not as often in public places such as civic organizations, houses of worship, and commercial locations (Wyatt, Katz, & Kim, 2000). These political discussions often give people a sense of group identity (Gamson, 1992; Walsh, 2004), but this identity can have less than desirable implications when it serves to isolate “us” from “them,” reinforcing groups norms and behaviors (Walsh, 2004).

Black (1982) suggests that individuals rely on those interpersonally close to them (such as family and friends) to “*define the situation . . . in terms that permit them to act*” (p. 170, italics in original). This suggests that individuals participate in the framing of an issue (Pan & Kosicki, 2001) and that these frames in conversation play an important role in opinion formation (Hoffman et al., 2004), specifically in terms of political efficacy and mobilization. In addition, some of the early voting studies indicate that there is an increased amount of political discussion among family and friends right before an election as compared to other times (Berelson et al., 1954). Thus discussion among family and friends is likely to play an especially important role in an election context. Again both framing and social identity theory are useful in explaining how these political discussions can re-legitimize and contest the dominant power structures in society. When people who are like-minded get together and talk about the election, these political discussions may integrate people in society through a shared identity with either of the major political parties (polarization frame) and increase levels of political efficacy and

mobilization. Yet these discussions can be divisive to the extent that they facilitate those who do not identify with either Democrats or Republicans to develop anti-identities with these groups and may thereby decrease levels of political efficacy and mobilization.

Thus the following hypothesis and research question address the role of political discussion as a “bottom up” process of the 2004 election:

H2: Frequency of political discussion with family and friends is positively related to political efficacy and mobilization.

While the literature suggests that political discussion often gives people a sense of group identity (Gamson, 1992; Walsh, 2004), there is insufficient evidence as to how or if discussion will be moderated by partisan identity in its effect on political efficacy and mobilization. Thus a research question is posed.

RQ2: Is the relationship between frequency of political discussion with family and friends and political efficacy and mobilization moderated by partisan identity?

In the context of the 2004 Presidential election, opinion leaders may have also played an important role as a “bottom-up” process. Across the United States, specifically in those states classified as “battleground states,” both the Bush and Kerry campaigns gathered large “armies” of volunteer citizens. These citizens were entrusted with the task of reaching the voting public by going door-to-door, passing out campaign literature, talking to people about the issues of the campaign, and encouraging people to vote. In addition to the Democratic and Republican parties in various states, a number of 527s such as America Coming Together (ACT) and Move On adopted a similar strategy in

attempting to get out the vote (Marlantes, 2004). In many respects, these volunteer citizens, who devoted their time, energy, and efforts to encouraging others to vote could be considered the some of the key opinion leaders during the 2004 election campaign. This is not to suggest that these citizens are necessarily “opinion leaders” in other contexts or in all contexts, but as the opinion leadership literature suggests, being an opinion leader is not simply having universal personality characteristics but instead is dependent on a particular social context. People occupy different social roles in various contexts. Thus a person who is an opinion leader in one context may not be in another (Domke et al., 2003; Roch, 2005).

One of the important features of the 2004 campaign opinion leaders is that the majority of them were average citizens, volunteering to go door-to-door in their own neighborhoods and communities in a get-out-the-vote effort. This is consistent with the opinion leadership literature as well. “Opinion leaders and the people whom they influence are very much alike and typically belong to the same primary groups of family, friends and co-workers. While the opinion leader may be more interested in the particular sphere in which he is influential, it is highly unlikely that the persons influenced will be very far behind the leader in their level of interest” (Katz, 1957, p. 77).

While certainly not the only factor in motivating people to vote or participate, these volunteer opinion leaders nonetheless may be seen as taking part in the “bottom up” social processes of the 2004 election (Black, 1982; Glynn, 2004; Carragee & Roefs, 2004; Walsh, 2004). For example, Burt (1999) repeatedly describes opinion leaders as “brokers” of information. In many ways, the political campaign in the 2004 election attempted to maximize this by getting volunteers to go into their own communities to

encourage others to vote. The volunteers acted as a “broker” of information between the political parties and average citizens. An opinion leader going door-to-door in his or her own community, talking to his or her own neighbors, is a likely context where the opinion leader can influence because the opinion leader is similar to and more close to average citizens than an official political party representative. As Robinson’s (1976) research suggests, contact with an opinion leader is “associated with a 7 percent higher voter turnout” (p. 316).

The following hypothesis and research question examine the importance of opinion leaders during the 2004 election.

H3: Contact with an opinion leader is positively related to political efficacy and mobilization.

Much like the political discussion literature, opinion leadership studies do not indicate clearly whether contact with an opinion leader is moderated by partisan identity in its effect on political efficacy and mobilization. When opinion leaders talk to others whom they are close to or are similar to, they are likely to influence others to adopt new behaviors (Burt, 1999). But, it is difficult to determine how those not identifying with either major political party will react to someone campaigning on behalf of a specific party or candidate. Will this increase political efficacy and mobilization, for example, because the volunteer is a member of the same community and is perceived to be similar to them? Or, will this perhaps decrease political efficacy and mobilization because, for example, they feel isolated and unattached to the same political party?

RQ3: Is the relationship between contact with an opinion leader and political efficacy and mobilization moderated by partisan identity?

In addition, as discussed previously, the functional role of opinion leadership as manifested in attempts to persuade others to vote for a particular party or candidate (Hamilton, 1971; Robinson, 1976) is not limited to the volunteer opinion leaders of the 2004 election. Thus it is important to consider other opinion leaders who served this functional role of being an opinion leader during the election much like the opinion leaders that Lazarsfeld et al. (1944) and many others have studied. Doing so in a current political context will help to validate prior work on opinion leadership which describes opinion leaders as having, for example, high levels of political efficacy and mobilization and high levels of attention to the mass media as compared to those who are not opinion leaders (Kingdon, 1970; Weimann, 1994).

H4: Being an opinion leader is positively related to political efficacy and mobilization.

RQ4: What are the various characteristics of opinion leaders and non-leaders as well as those contacted by opinion leaders and those not contacted by opinion leaders?

In addition to the aforementioned dependent and independent variables, party identification, education, gender, age, race, and income serve as important control variables in this study because of their demonstrated importance to the processes of framing, political discussion, and public opinion (e.g. Conover & Sapiro, 1993; Eveland, 2004; Iyengar & Simon, 1993; Kennamer, 1990; Kim et al., 1999; Knauper, 1999; Mutz



& Soss, 1997; Robinson, Shaver, & Wrightsman, 1999; Scheufele, 1999, 2000; Sotirovic, 2000; Straits, 1990; Wyatt, Kim, & Katz, 2000).

The question remains then as to how one could go about examining the “top-down” process of media framing and “bottom-up” processes of political discussion and opinion leadership during the 2004 election campaign. Examining a process implies the need for a longitudinal study. In the framing literature, there is much evidence that framing is a complex process (D’Angelo, 2002), yet few scholars are able to conduct longitudinal research (e.g., Callaghan & Schnell, 2001; Iyengar & Simon, 1993; Walsh, 2004). The situation is very similar in the public opinion literature. Many have described public opinion as a process (Crespi, 1997; Davison, 1957; Glynn, 2004; Noelle-Neumann, 1993; Price & Roberts, 1987), but few have examined it as such (e.g., Hoffman, Glynn, Huge, Sietman, & Thomson, 2005; Shamir & Shamir, 2000). This is demonstrated by the prevalence of cross-sectional public opinion studies (e.g., Major, 2000; Moy, Domke, & Stamm, 2001; Moy, McCoy, Spratt, & McCluskey, 2003; Price, Cappella, & Nir, 2002; Riffe, 2003).

In addition to conducting a longitudinal study, it is important to use a multi-methodological approach. While survey research is common in most public opinion studies (Henry & Gordon, 2001; Kim et al., 1999; Major, 2000; Moy et al., 2001, 2003; Price et al., 2002; Riffe, 2003; Willnat, 1995), framing effects research is dominated by experiments (e.g., Davis, 1995; Druckman & Nelson, 2003; Kinder & Sanders, 1996; McLeod & Detenber, 1999; Rhee, 1997; Shah, Domke, & Wackman, 1996; Shen, 2004a, 2004b). While experiments are important for control and for determining causal linkages, studies conducted in a real-world setting are important for generalizability

beyond the experimental setting. Shah et al. (1996) call for an exploration of framing, political efficacy and mobilization beyond an experimental setting: “Examination of these relationships in a survey setting would further test the generalizability of the relationship explored here. If a detailed content analysis and panel study were undertaken for an electoral race during an upcoming election season, many questions might be answered. An understanding of the possible media frames of issues within a natural environment, combined with information about media use, candidate evaluations, and issue interpretations gathered from a randomly selected panel of likely voters, would provide a rich understanding of the ties between media frames, issue interpretations, and voters’ decision-making strategies. Clearly, the relationships among these phenomena deserve further attention” (p. 535).

This study follows Shamir and Shamir’s (2000) triangulated methodological approach by incorporating a content analysis of media frames and a field study of opinion leaders with survey data from a random, national sample. In many ways, this study is also modeled after Walsh (2004) who used three methods—a media content analysis, participant observation, and national survey data—to conduct an in-depth study of political discussion. The present study differs from Walsh’s (2004) research in several ways. First, the process of framing is a key focus of this research. Second, the context of the 2004 election campaign is very different. Walsh (2004) studied primarily a group of retired gentlemen who met in a coffee shop. Third, the role of opinion leadership as a “bottom up” process is a key focal point for this study whereas opinion leaders were not included in Walsh’s (2004) research.

Both conceptually and methodologically, the present study addresses important aspects of the communication process from the perspective of both interpersonal and mass communication. There are a number of conflicting results within the literature as to the nature of the relationship among mass communication and interpersonal communication processes. For example, it is not clear whether there is an interaction between interpersonal communication and media use, as Scheufele's (2002) study suggests, or if interpersonal communication mediates the relationships between media and its presumed effects (e.g., Wyatt et al., 2000). Numerous views abound. As Robinson and Levy (1986b) assert based on their findings, "it is plausible to speculate that conversations about the news will both increase the 'accuracy' with which news messages are comprehended and the degree to which those messages may have ideological, essentially status quo consequences" (p.173). Weaver, Zhu, and Willnat (1992) maintain that interpersonal communication serves as a "bridging" function in media effects (specifically, agenda-setting). "Not only does interpersonal discussion often reinforce the influence of mass media, but it also connects the personal world with the larger societal world outside the individual's immediate experience" (Weaver et al., 1992, p.860). Petty (1988) finds an additive effect rather than an interaction effect of interpersonal communication and media on learning from the news.

In a study examining voting specifically, Mondak (1995) attempts to examine the central question of whether media and discussion "produce conflicting or complimentary influence on political behavior" (p. 83) and finds that both are true, although he admits that a context in which a conflicting influence would be observed is rare, much like the

newspaper strike in his study. Mondak (1995) concludes that both media and discussion contribute to the “information mix” which results in a vote choice.

Clearly there is no perfect way to examine both mass and interpersonal processes within any given study, but I have chosen to do so from Mondak’s (1995) standpoint of the complimentary nature of these processes in influencing political attitudes and behavior. In this study, I attempt to bring together the unique perspectives of both mass communication and interpersonal communication in understanding the 2004 election. I take a mass communication perspective by examining the polarization frame via content analysis and using survey data to consider the possible differential effects of this frame on political efficacy and mobilization based on partisan identity. This approach is consistent with a rich research tradition found in mass communication literature that examines both the content and effects of the mass media (Botta, 1999; Callaghan & Schnell, 2001; Hoffstetter, Barker, Smith, Zari, & Ingrassia, 1999; Pan & Kosicki, 1997; Scharrer, 2001; Semetko and Valkenburg, 2000). I take an interpersonal communication perspective by including political discussion among family and friends as a key concept in the study and by conducting a field study of election opinion leaders, interacting with these individuals for a period of several weeks leading up to the election and observing them go door-to-door in their communities. This approach is more in line with a research tradition grounded in interpersonal communication that is concerned with identity formation within everyday conversations (Tracy, 2002) and very interested in the ordinary interactions that occur among friends (Gudykunst, Nishida, & Chua, 1987), romantic partners (Bryant & Conger, 1999), and teachers and students (Van Zee, 2000).

### *Research Questions and Hypotheses Summary*

Based on the literature reviewed, the following list is a summary of the research questions and hypotheses I tested in the context of the 2004 election campaign.

RQ1: How frequently did the media use the polarization frame in coverage of the 2004 election?

H1: Attention to media coverage of the campaign is positively related to political efficacy and mobilization.

H1a: The relationship between attention to media coverage of the campaign and political efficacy and mobilization is moderated by partisan identity

H2: Frequency of political discussion with family and friends is positively related to political efficacy and mobilization.

RQ2: Is the relationship between frequency of political discussion with family and friends and political efficacy and mobilization moderated by partisan identity?

H3: Contact with an opinion leader is positively related to political efficacy and mobilization.

RQ3: Is the relationship between contact with an opinion leader and political efficacy and mobilization moderated by partisan identity?

H4: Being an opinion leader is positively related to political efficacy and mobilization.

RQ4: What are the various characteristics of opinion leaders and non-leaders as well as those contacted by opinion leaders and those not contacted by opinion leaders?

## CHAPTER 3

### METHOD

To examine media framing, political discussion, and opinion leadership in the context of the 2004 election, I used three different research methods—survey, a field study, and content analysis.

#### Survey

First, I used time-series data from the 2004 National Election Study released on March 28, 2005. The pre-election study contains data from 1,212 face-to-face interviews whereas the post-election study contains data from 1,066 face-to-face interviews of the original 1,212 respondents. The pre-election interviews were approximately 70 minutes and were conducted beginning on September 7, 2004. The post-election interviews, approximately 65 minutes in length, began the day after the election on November 3, 2004 and ended on December 20, 2004. The response rate for the pre-election survey was 66.1%, whereas the response rate for the post-election survey was 88.0%. Each of the interview questions used in this study are listed in Appendix A.

### *Media Attention*

From the post-election study, I included a measure of media attention that asked respondents about their overall attention to the campaign. This question asked respondents “how much attention did” they pay to news in general “about the campaign for President—a great deal, quite a bit, some, very little, or none.” Responses for this item were coded on a scale of 1 to 5 , with 1 being “none,” 2 being “very little,” 3 being “some,” 4 being “quite a bit,” and 5 being “a great deal.”

### *Frequency of Political Discussion*

To measure frequency of political discussion with family and friends, I created a scale of two questions from the post-election study. The first question asked respondents whether they “ever discuss politics” with their “family or friends” (yes = 1, no = 0). The second question asked respondents who answered yes “how many days in the past week” did they “talk about politics with family or friends?” Adding these two questions together, responses ranged from “0” which indicates that a respondent never discusses politics with family and friends to “8” which indicates that a respondent discusses politics with family and friends and had done so everyday during the previous week.

### *Opinion Leadership*

To examine the role of opinion leadership in the election, I used two different variables. The first opinion leadership variable, contact with an opinion leader, was also assessed with a scale of two different questions from the post-election study. One question asked respondents if “anyone from one of the political parties” called them up or came around and talked to them “about the campaign this year” (yes = 1, no = 0). Another question asked respondents if anyone else besides “someone from the two major



parties” called them up or came around and talked to them “about supporting specific candidates in this last election” (yes = 1, no = 0). These two questions were added together so that responses ranged from “0” meaning no contact with an opinion leader to “2” meaning contact with two different opinion leaders. In addition to contact with an opinion leader, I also assessed how being an opinion leader affected the 2004 election by using a survey item from the post-election study that asked respondents whether “during the campaign” they talked to anyone “to show them why they should vote for or against one of the parties or candidates” (yes = 1, no = 0).

### *Party Identification*

For univariate analyses in which I report descriptive statistics for party identification, I used the following question from the pre-election study: “Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or what?” Republicans were coded as 0, Independents and others as 1, and Democrats were coded as 2. For all other analyses, including bivariate and multivariate analyses, I used a summary variable provided by the NES which indicated the relative strength of partisanship. I recoded this variable so that 4 indicates a “strong Democrat” or a “strong Republican,” 3 indicates a “weak Democrat” or a “weak Republican,” 2 indicates an “Independent-Democrat” or an “Independent-Republican,” and 1 indicates an “Independent-Independent,” someone who belongs to another party, or someone who does not have a party affiliation (c.f., Huckfeldt, Mendez, & Osborn, 2004; Scheufele et al., 2003). I use the terms “partisanship” and “partisan identity” interchangeably in referring to this folded-over measure. To measure the interaction between media attention and partisanship, I created a new variable by multiplying the z-score variables

of media attention and partisanship together. Secondly, to measure the interaction between political discussion and partisanship, I created a new variable by multiplying the z-score variables of political discussion and partisanship together. Finally, to measure the interaction between contact with an opinion leader and partisanship, I created a new variable by multiplying the z-score variables of contact with an opinion leader and partisanship together.

### *Battleground State*

To measure whether or not respondents lived in a battleground state, I created a dummy variable where all battleground states were coded as 1 and non-battleground states were coded as 0. As discussed in the literature review, the 17 states included as battleground states are as follows: Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Ohio, West Virginia, Michigan, Wisconsin, Iowa, Minnesota, Colorado, New Mexico, Nevada, Oregon, Washington, and Florida (“The Great Ad Wars of 2004,” 2004).

### *Other Control Variables*

In addition to party identification and battleground state, several other questions from the pre-election study were used to measure important control variables. First, I measured education with a question that asked respondents to identify their “highest grade of school or year of college . . . completed.” Responses to this item were coded in number of years, ranging from “0” indicating no education, “1” indicating 1 year of education, “2” indicating 2 years of education, “3” indicating 3 years of education, and so on up to 17, which was used to indicate 17 years or more of education. To measure gender, I used responses from the interviewers who coded respondents as either male or

female (male = 0, female = 1). I used a summary variable provided by the NES to measure age. The NES summary variable was created from respondents' answer to the following question: "What is the ... year of your birth?" Race was measured by a question which asked respondents "what racial or ethnic group or groups best describes" them (white = 0, non-white = 1). Finally, I measured income with a question that asked respondents to indicate the "income group that includes the income of all members of" their family "in 2003 before taxes," including "salaries, wages, pensions, dividends, interest, and all other income." The response options for income are as follows: 1 = no income - \$2,999; 2 = \$3,000-4,999; 3 = \$5,000-6,999; 4 = \$7,000-8,999; 5 = \$9,000-10,999; 6 = \$11,000-12,999; 7 = \$13,000-14,999; 8 = \$15,000-16,999; 9 = \$17,000-19,999; 10 = \$20,000-21,999; 11 = \$22,000-24,999; 12 = \$25,000-29,999; 13 = \$30,000-34,999; 14 = \$35,000-39,999; 15 = \$40,000-44,999; 16 = \$45,000-49,999; 17 = \$50,000-59,999; 18 = \$60,000-69,999; 19 = \$70,000-79,999; 20 = \$80,000-89,999; 21 = \$90,000-104,999; 22 = \$105,000-119,999; and 23 = \$120,000 and up.

### *Dependent Variables*

Because of the two dimensions of political efficacy as discussed in Abramson's (1983) work, I used both a principle-components factor analysis and a principal axis factor analysis to determine whether the distinction between internal and external political efficacy was warranted for the 2004 NES data. Both analyses confirmed two distinct dimensions, with 4 items loading as one factor, external political efficacy, and 2 items loading as a separate factor, internal political efficacy. The 4 items measuring external political efficacy assessed the extent to which respondents believe that the government and public officials are responsive to "people like me." These items were

then averaged together so that responses ranged from 1, indicating low levels of external political efficacy, to 5, indicating high levels of external political efficacy (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .715$ ). Even though two items loaded together as a separate and distinct factor, using the principal axis extraction method, they loaded together as one factor rather weakly. Taking both the factor analysis results and the political efficacy literature into consideration, I chose to use only one of the items to measure internal political efficacy. Only one of the two items is conceptually and operationally consistent with the political efficacy literature (Abramson, 1983; Campbell et al., 1954). Internal political efficacy was measured by an item that asked respondents the extent to which they believed that "who people vote for" makes a difference, with responses again ranging from 1, indicating low levels of internal political efficacy, to 5, indicating high levels of internal political efficacy.

I measured political participation with a scale of 8 items that asked respondents whether or not they participated in various activities during the campaign such as wearing a campaign button, donating money to a candidate or party, attending any political rallies, etc. (yes = 1, no = 0). I added these items together so that the responses ranged from 0, indicating that a respondent participated in none of these activities, to 8, indicating that a respondent participated in all of these activities (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .658$ ).

The last dependent variable, voter turnout, was measured with two different questions from the post-election study. Respondents were randomly assigned to either a "standard" version of the question or an "experimental" version of the question. The standard version reads as follows: "In talking to people about elections, we often find that a lot of people were not able to vote because they weren't registered, they were sick, or

they just didn't have time. How about you—did you vote in the elections this November?" (yes = 1, no = 0). The experimental version uses the same opening statement but instead asked respondents which of the following statements best describes them: "One, I did not vote"; "Two, I thought about voting this time—but didn't"; "Three, I usually vote, but didn't this time"; or "Four, I am sure I voted." Responses to both versions were coded as a dummy variable with "yes" and "I am sure I voted" coded as 1 and with "no" and experimental responses one, two, and three coded as 0. Univariate analysis revealed that a greater percentage of respondents answered "yes" to the standard version of the question as compared to the experimental version of the question. Because of the potential impact stemming from the difference in voter turnout measures, I created a dummy variable (experimental version = 1, standard version = 0) to include as a control for question wording in all analyses predicting voter turnout.

### Field Study

To better understand the role of opinion leaders in the framing process, I used qualitative observations of Bush and Kerry volunteers in the battleground state of Ohio. For approximately three weeks leading up to the election, I went door-to-door with these volunteers, observing them as they passed out campaign literature, talked to people about the issues of the campaign, and encouraged people to vote. I did not take part in these activities, but I went along with the opinion leaders, talking with them informally one-on-one and then observing them as they interacted with others. I spent an equal number of days and hours in the campaign headquarters and with volunteers for both political parties. I also observed volunteers who were fairly diverse in gender, age, socioeconomic background, education, and race. After each block of time with a given volunteer or at a

particular campaign's headquarters, I took notes about my observations. These notes are important to this study by both legitimizing and questioning the results obtained from the survey data concerning the role of opinion leaders in the framing of the 2004 Presidential election.

### Content Analysis

This framing study would not be complete without a content analysis of media designed to examine the polarization frame. While the framing studies reviewed earlier typically compare the usage of two or more frames at a time, this study is unique in its focus on the prevalence of one frame, the polarization frame. Because of this, the content analysis focused on whether or not the polarization frame was used in a particular news story. This study did not compare and contrast the polarization frame with other frames or attempt to identify what the other frames were. Rather, each news story was coded as either using the polarization frame or not using the polarization frame. This study most clearly follows the list of frames approach as described in Tankard (2001), using both human coders and computer-based keyword searches in Lexis-Nexis, and integrates a number of other content analysis and framing guidelines in designing the specific procedures (see DeVreese et al., 2001; Krippendorff, 2004; Neuendorf, 2002; Riffe, Lacy, & Fico, 1998).

### *Sample*

I included two different newspapers, *The New York Times* and *USA Today*; and two television news sources, ABC news and Fox news. The sampling period began on September 1, 2004 and ended on November 2, 2004. Using Lexis-Nexis, I generated a sampling frame for each of the sources separately. For the newspapers, I used simple

random sampling (specifically, a table of random numbers) within each sampling frame (i.e., stratified sampling) to select specific news articles for content analysis. Random sampling of the newspaper articles was warranted because of the sheer volume of news articles relating to the 2004 election. A cursory keyword search (“election” or “campaign” in headlines, lead paragraphs, terms) in Lexis-Nexis during the sampling period produces 2,183 articles in *The New York Times* and 623 articles in *USA Today*. Thus approximately 200 articles from each newspaper were randomly sampled and included in the content analysis.

For the television news sources, I included all news transcripts relating to the election appearing on either World News Tonight with Peter Jennings (ABC news) or Fox Special Report with Brit Hume (Fox news). A total of 94 transcripts from ABC news were included along with 83 transcripts from Fox news.

In this study, news stories were defined as “all non-advertising matter in a news product” (Riffe et al., 1998, p. 112). For the newspapers in this study, this includes “all staff-produced news stories found in the first and ‘local’ sections” (Riffe et al., 1998, p. 112) as well as editorial pages and op ed pages but excludes letters to the editor. For the television news sources in this study, reference to “news story” includes televised news broadcast transcripts. Only news stories relating to the 2004 election in the United States were included. Thus news stories were the units of analysis and sampling units for this study. In the case of television news, these news stories consisted of the individual abstracts or news segments as generated by Lexis-Nexus.

### *Coding Procedure*

For each news story included in the content analysis, coders used the Coding Sheet (see Appendix B) to determine whether the polarization frame was used. Specifically, the following variables were examined. First, the coders recorded an identification number for each article or transcript as well as the story day (month, day, year) and source name (the specific newspaper or television news broadcast). Then, the coders answered “yes” (1) or “no” (0) as to whether the article or transcript contained any of the keywords, catchphrases, or symbols associated with the polarization frame. These keywords, catchphrases, and symbols are based on Fiorina’s (2005) conceptualization of the polarization frame as documented in his book.

### *Reliability*

The primary variable analyzed was whether or not the news story used the polarization frame (yes = 1, no = 0). Seven coders examined a total of 605 news stories. I conducted several coder training sessions to increase intercoder reliability, once before pilot reliability was assessed and once after. Intercoder reliability was assessed using Cohen’s kappa because it takes into account chance agreement (Neuendorf, 2002). Since there is no single agreed upon strategy for conducting reliability analyses with multiple coders, I assessed reliability for pairs of coders and then averaged the “reliability coefficients across all pairs of coders” (Neuendorf, 2002, p. 161). The pilot reliability coefficients were all above .90, meeting standards set by Riffe, Lacy, and Fico (1998). The final reliability coefficient was computed using a randomly selected subsample of 10% of the news stories, meeting Wimmer and Dominick’s (1997) suggestion, with Cohen’s kappa at .84.



## Data analysis

Data analysis for the content analysis component of this study consisted of coding the news stories as to whether or not they contained the polarization frame. This data was entered into SPSS and used to report the overall frequency of the polarization frame, the frequency of the polarization frame for each source, whether the polarization frame varied over time, and which aspects of the frame were most prominent. In addition, qualitative examples of the polarization frame were taken from the news sources to better illustrate the use of the polarization frame during the 2004 election.

To analyze the survey data, both OLS regression and logistic regression were used to examine the effects of attention to campaign media, frequency of political discussion with family and friends, opinion leadership, party identification, battleground state, education, gender, age, race, and income on political efficacy and mobilization. In addition to the main effects of media, discussion, and opinion leadership, I also tested for interaction effects between these independent variables and partisan identity.

Finally, the field study consisted of qualitative observations which were used to both explain and question the results obtained from the survey data analysis as well as to link the entire study together and thereby better understand the “top down” process of media framing and the “bottom up” processes of political discussion and opinion leadership during the 2004 election.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

In this chapter, I will first present the results of the content analysis portion of this study, followed by the results obtained from the secondary analysis of NES survey data. I will conclude the chapter by discussing the results from the qualitative field study and demonstrating how the three methods together help to explain both the top down and bottom up processes of the 2004 Presidential election.

#### Content Analysis

In a content analysis of the *New York Times*, *USA Today*, ABC news, and Fox news, I investigated the prevalence of the polarization frame. Specifically, RQ1 asked how frequently the media used the polarization frame in coverage of the 2004 election. Analysis of these sources revealed that the polarization frame was used quite frequently during the 2004 election. Out of 605 coded news stories, a total of 497 (82.2%) of the stories used the polarization frame. Examining the polarization frame in each specific source, the results were very similar. *The New York Times* used the polarization frame in 77.6% of the articles examined while 81.6% of the articles in *USA Today* were consistent with the polarization frame. Television news articles had even higher percentages with 87.2% of the stories from ABC news containing the polarization frame and 89.1% of the stories from Fox news using the polarization frame. Stories with the polarization frame

were coded as “1” whereas stories without the polarization frame were coded as “0.” This approach yielded a mean rating of .822 ( $SD = .383$ ), which was found to be significantly different from zero,  $t(605) = 52.72, p < .0005$ . Table 1 in Appendix C presents the cross-tabulation of news source and the polarization frame.

In addition, the use of the polarization frame did not seem to vary significantly over time. I first examined a cross-tabulation of the polarization frame and time. During the month of September, 176 (80%) of the news stories (out of 219 coded during that month) used the polarization frame whereas during the month of October, 321 (83%) of the news stories (out of 386 coded during that month) used the polarization frame. Further evidence came from a non-significant correlation between the polarization frame and time ( $r = .05, p = .18$ ).

It is also interesting to note the number of different key words and phrases within each news story that indicated the existence of the polarization frame. The average number of different key words and phrases illustrating the polarization within a news story was 2.25. Of the 497 news stories containing the polarization frame, 167 of them (33.6%) included only one of the key words or phrases indicating the presence of the polarization frame; 169 (34%) included two different key words or phrases; 93 (18.7%) included three different keys words or phrases; 34 (6.8%) included four different key words or phrases; 18 (3.6%) included five different key words or phrases; and 16 (3.2%) included six or more different key words or phrases. Interestingly, one news story from the *New York Times* contained 11 different key words or phrases associated with the polarization frame.

Certain key words or phrases indicating the polarization frame were more prominent in the news coverage of the 2004 election. Among the news stories using the polarization frame, “war,” “battle,” or similar war-like terms were the most common indicators of the polarization frame, occurring in 285 stories (57.3%). Next, 228 news stories (45.9%) indicated the presence of the polarization frame with a variety of different words and phrases (the miscellaneous category on the coding sheet). The third most common indicator was reference to “conflict,” “collision,” or “controversy,” occurring in 183 news stories (36.8%). Descriptions of the United States as “divided” occurred in 109 news stories (21.9%), followed by descriptions of the United States via metaphors that pit two component of popular culture against one another in 95 stories (19.1%). A total of 59 news stories (11.9%) illustrated the polarization frame by describing the United States as “50-50,” “half,” or something similar. Descriptions of the United States as “split” occurred in 33 news stories (6.6%), and references to “blue” states and/or “red” states were also found in 33 stories (6.6%). Next, 31 news stories (6.2%) described the United States as “polarized.” A total of 26 news stories (5.2%) described the United States as “bitter.” In addition, an equal number of stories described the United States as “extreme” or “separated”: both indicators of the polarization frame occurred in 13 different news stories (2.6%). Some stories included visual depictions of the polarization frame: 8 news stories (1.6%) included a map of the United States color-coded with “blue” states and “red” states. Finally, only 3 stories (.6%) described the United States as experiencing a “chasm.”

The following news story excerpts illustrate the nature of the coverage of the 2004 presidential election characterized by the polarization frame. In a *USA Today*

article on September 20, voters were described as “being drawn into red and blue camps on the eve of another presidential election” (Wendel, 2004, p. 23A). Later on October 8, Nichols (2004) stated, “The nation is divided between staunchly Democratic and Republican states” (p. 4A). There seemed to be a consensus that “A politically divided country is at work, with partisans relentlessly pushing their agendas on news outlets that thrive on controversy” (Johnson, 2004, p. 5D). Another *USA Today* writer put it this way: “this year, with an electorate that was polarized from the start, the heart of both campaigns has been identifying and mobilizing supporters” (Page, 2004, p. 1A). In addition to describing voters as “divided,” a *USA Today* news story on November 1 suggested the reasons behind this could be attributed to “a caustic campaign, a divisive war and a presidency that voters love or loathe” (p. 20A). In fact, Grady (2004) suggests that “Sen. John Kerry and President Bush polarized the country into blue-vs.-red-state uncivil war” (p. 21A).

Quoting political scientist David Baker, a *New York Times*’ writer describes “a marked drop in political discussion, at least between those who disagree” because “it is so divided ... and contested, and people feel so deeply” (Bennet, 2004, p. 23). Describing “Oregon’s Culture Clash,” another *New York Times* writer continually referred to a “red and blue clash” in various counties and also suggested that “the two political cultures of the state collide” in these counties (Egan, 2004, p. 15). Not surprisingly, many news stories featured Florida, “the prime battleground of the election” as a place illustrating this so-called “divided, polarized” nation. Those who gathered to hear candidate campaign speeches were described as “crowds” of “passion and rage”:

“the intensity of feeling is red hot on both sides of the political divide” (Nagourney & Goodnough, 2004, p. 1).

Additional examples from television news illustrate the polarization frame. On October 18, ABC news featured statements from citizens about “Missouri and other parts of the country” with descriptions such as, “Very divided, 50/50,” and with Peter Jennings concluding that “Folks still seem pretty divided.” Another similar news story from ABC addressed the opposite conclusions that citizens were reaching regarding the economy, Bush supporters taking a highly positive view and Kerry supporters taking a highly negative view. To this news as reported by Betsy Stark, ABC news business correspondent, Peter Jennings replied, “That’s interesting. Once more, divided.” On November 1, ABC news even featured a news segment entitled “Divided they stand” discussing not only the “50/50 nation” that is “so deeply divided on the issues” but also “50/50 families” who supposedly mirror these polar views of the nation. In late September, Fox news also described the U.S. as a “polarized 50/50 nation” and in October featured a sound bite from John Zogby who claimed that “we’ve really polarized into two separate nations this year more than we were in 2000.” These and other similar excerpts are featured in Appendix C, Table 2.

Survey

### *Descriptive Results*

Appendix C, Table 3 presents the descriptive summary statistics for the variables party identification, battleground states, education, gender, age, race, income, media attention, frequency of political discussion, contact with opinion leader, being an opinion leader, internal political efficacy, external political efficacy, voter turnout (standard

version), voter turnout (experimental version), and political participation. In addition, Appendix C, Table 4 presents frequencies for the survey variables gender, age, race, party identification, battleground state, contact with opinion leader, being an opinion leader, voter turnout (standard version), and voter turnout (experimental version) with some U.S. population comparisons from Census 2000 data. All of these reported descriptive results are based on unweighted data.

The basic demographics of the respondents in this sample are worth noting. A total of 31.5% identified with the Democratic Party whereas 28.6% considered themselves to be Republican. Roughly two thirds of the sample, 65.4%, did not live in a battleground state at the time of the 2004 election.

Respondents averaged 13.69 years of education, with the median being 14 years. Twelve years of education, a high school education, was the most frequent response for this survey item. The lowest level of education completed by these respondents is one year, and the highest reported level of education is 17+ years, indicating post-graduate training or professional schooling after college.

In the present sample, much like the US Census, there are more women than men: 53.3% of the respondents are female. The average age of the respondents is 47.27 years old while half of the respondents are 47 years old or younger, and half of the respondents are 47 years old or older. The most frequent age among the respondents is 28 years old. The standard deviation from the mean for age is 17.14, and the range of ages for the respondents in this survey is 18 years old to 90 years old. In comparison with US Census 2000 data, as presented in Appendix C, Table 4, the median age for respondents in this survey is higher than the median age for the US population of 35.3. However, since the

US population median age is based on ages 0 and up whereas the median age for this survey is based on ages 18 and up, this discrepancy should be expected.

When examining the racial composition of the respondents in this sample, it is evident that the majority of the respondents are white, which is also true of the US population. The specific percentages reveal that the sample slightly under-represents whites (72.3%) when compared to the 77.4% of whites found in the US population as well as Asians (2.3% vs. 3.7%) and therefore over-represents blacks (14.9% in the sample vs. 11.4% in the population) and those of other or mixed race (10.6% vs. 7.4%). While the sample in this survey is not identical to the US population, it nonetheless appears to be a fairly representative sample when examining age, gender, and race specifically.

The median total household income for respondents was \$45,000 to \$49,999. More respondents have incomes of \$120,000+ than any other income category. The lowest total household income for these respondents is \$2,999 a year or less, and the highest reported household income is \$120,000 or more.

In addition to the aforementioned demographic control variables, descriptive statistics for the independent and dependent variables are interesting to examine. The median for media attention was 4, indicating that half of the respondents paid “quite a bit” of attention or more to the campaign. “Quite a bit” of attention (4) was also the most frequent response. Responses ranged from 1 indicating no attention to 5 indicating “a great deal” of attention to the campaign.

Half of the respondents not only discuss politics with their family and friends but had done so 2 or more times during the past week. Despite this, the most frequent



response given was that respondents never discuss politics with family and friends. The range of responses for frequency of political discussion is 0 (never discuss politics with family and friends) to 8 (discuss politics with family and friends and did so everyday during the past week).

The measures of opinion leadership indicated that 11.4% of the sample had contact with someone from one of the political parties and with someone else endorsing a party or candidate while 40.4% of respondents had contact with at least one opinion leader. Almost half (48.2%) of the respondents never had contact with an opinion leader. Interestingly, approximately half (48.5%) of the sample indicated that they had talked to someone and tried to persuade them to vote for a specific candidate while 51.5% had not done so.

For the variable political efficacy, the median for internal efficacy was 4 and the median for external efficacy was 3.25 indicating moderately high levels of political efficacy. The most frequent response for internal efficacy was 5 indicating that more respondents strongly agreed that, on a scale of 1 to 5, “Who people vote for can make a difference” than any other response. The responses for internal efficacy ranged from those participants who felt that “who people vote for won’t make a difference (1) to those participants who felt that “who people vote for can make a difference” (5). The most frequent response for external efficacy was 3 on the scale of 1 to 5 regarding the government’s responsiveness to what people think. Again, the responses ranged from 1, indicating a belief in the government’s lack of responsiveness to 5, indicating a belief that the government is very responsive to citizens.

The respondents were fairly mobilized politically. In both the standard version and experimental version, there were more respondents who reportedly voted than not. With the standard version, a total of 82.1% indicated that “yes” they voted whereas with the experimental version only 74.9% indicated “yes” they voted. However, participation levels were fairly low, with both the median and mode for participation at 0. Responses ranged from 0, indicating no political participation to 8, indicating respondents who participated in all 8 political activities.

### *Bivariate Results*

Appendix C, Tables 6 and 7 present the bivariate correlations of all the variables used in this analysis. Not surprisingly, all of the dependent variables have positive relationships with each other. Internal political efficacy has a positive correlation with education but a negative correlation with race. In addition, internal efficacy has a positive association with partisanship and is positively related to each of the independent variables—media attention, frequency of political discussion with family and friends, contact with opinion leader, and being an opinion leader. The results for external political efficacy are similar but distinct: external political efficacy has a positive correlation with education, income, and partisanship but negative correlations with gender and race. External political efficacy is also positively related to 4 of the 6 independent variables: media attention, frequency of political discussion with family and friends, and contact with opinion leader.

Voter turnout (standard version) has positive correlations with education, age, and income but a negative correlation with race. In addition, voter turnout (standard version) is positively associated with partisanship and battleground state as well as each of the

independent variables—media attention, frequency of political discussion with family and friends, contact with opinion leader, and being an opinion leader. Similarly, voter turnout (experimental version) has positive relationships with education, age, and income. Voter turnout (experimental version) also is positively correlated with partisanship, media attention, frequency of political discussion with family and friends, contact with opinion leader, and being an opinion leader.

Finally, political participation has positive relationships with education, age, and income but a negative relationship with race. There is also a positive association between participation and partisanship. Political participation is positively correlated with the independent variables media attention, frequency of political discussion with family and friends, contact with opinion leader, and being an opinion leader.

While these bivariate correlations serve as a source of interesting observations that suggest initial support for some of the hypotheses, they cannot serve as a definitive test. First and foremost, these correlations do not represent the relationships of these variables when controlling for other related concepts. Another reason these correlations do not offer definitive support or rejection of the hypotheses lies in the nature of the dependent variable voter turnout. Because this variable is a dichotomous variable, it is mathematically impossible for voter turnout to be perfectly correlated with any of the continuous variables. Thus the size of the bivariate correlations may not be truly representative of the nature of the relationships of the independent variables with voter turnout.

The bivariate correlations found in Tables 6 and 7 can also be examined to assess whether or not multicollinearity may be present in this analysis. These bivariate

correlations between the independent variables do not seem to indicate the presence of multicollinearity. None of the correlations are high enough to cause concern that multicollinearity is creating a problem in this analysis.

### *Multivariate Results*

In this section, I will first present the results relating to media attention (Hypothesis 1 and 1a), political discussion (Hypothesis 2 and Research Question 2), contact with an opinion leader (Hypothesis 3 and Research Question 3), and being an opinion leader (Hypothesis 4). Appendix C, Tables 8, 9, and 10 present the OLS regression and binary logistic regression results pertaining to these hypotheses and research questions. Then I will conclude this section with the results for Research Question 4 concerning the various characteristics of opinion leaders and non-leaders as well as those contacted by opinion leaders and those not contacted by opinion leaders. Appendix C, Tables 11 and 12 present the results of ANOVA tests that help to answer Research Question 4.

### Hypothesis 1: Media

Hypothesis 1 predicted that attention to media coverage of the campaign is positively related to political efficacy and mobilization. Even after control variables, attention to media coverage of the campaign still explains a significant amount of variance in internal political efficacy,  $R^2 = .03$ ,  $F(1, 1046) = 27.88$ ,  $p < .0005$ ; external political efficacy,  $R^2 = .01$ ,  $F(1, 1046) = 6.75$ ,  $p = .005$ ; and political participation,  $R^2 = .04$ ,  $F(1, 1044) = 44.60$ ,  $p < .0005$ . Attention to media coverage of the campaign was also a significant predictor of voter turnout,  $\text{Exp}(B) = 1.71$ ,  $p < .0005$ .

Taken together, the OLS regression and binary logistic regression results provide support for Hypothesis 1. Attention to media coverage of the campaign has a positive relationship with political efficacy and mobilization.

### Hypothesis 1a

Hypothesis 1a predicted that the relationship between attention to media coverage of the campaign and political efficacy and mobilization is moderated by partisan identity. With controls, the effect of media attention on internal political efficacy ( $\beta = -.03$ ,  $p = .17$ ) and external political efficacy ( $\beta = .001$ ,  $p = .49$ ) did not depend on partisan identity. However, the effect of media attention on political participation ( $\beta = .06$ ,  $p = .01$ ) and voter turnout ( $\text{Exp [B]} = .74$ ,  $p = .001$ ) did depend on partisan identity.

Thus Hypothesis 1a is partially supported. The relationship between attention to media coverage of the campaign and political efficacy is not moderated by partisan identity. However, there is a significant interaction effect of media attention and party identity on political mobilization.

### Hypothesis 2: Political Discussion

Hypothesis 2 predicted that frequency of political discussion with family and friends is positively related to political efficacy and mobilization. Controlling for a number of variables, frequency of political discussion with family and friends still explains a significant amount of variance in internal political efficacy,  $R^2 = .002$ ,  $F(1, 1045) = 2.69$ ,  $p = .05$ ; external political efficacy,  $R^2 = .003$ ,  $F(1, 1045) = 3.72$ ,  $p = .03$ ; and political participation,  $R^2 = .05$ ,  $F(1, 1043) = 64.10$ ,  $p < .0005$ . Political discussion also has a main effect on voter turnout,  $\text{Exp (B)} = 1.18$ ,  $p < .0005$ .

These results support the predictions of Hypothesis 2. Frequency of political discussion with family and friends has a positive relationship with political efficacy and mobilization.

### Research Question 2

Research question 2 asked if the relationship between frequency of political discussion with family and friends and political efficacy and mobilization is moderated by partisan identity. With the control variables accounted for in the model, the effect of political discussion on internal political efficacy ( $\beta = .04, p = .26$ ), external political efficacy ( $\beta = .01, p = .76$ ), and voter turnout ( $\text{Exp [B]} = 1.14, p = .27$ ) did not depend on partisan identity. However, the effect of political discussion on political participation was moderated by partisan identity ( $\beta = .10, p = .001$ ).

As a whole, these regressions produce mixed results for Research Question 2. There is no interaction effect of political discussion and partisan identity on political efficacy and voter turnout, but the effect of political discussion on political participation is moderated by partisan identity.

### Hypothesis 3: Contact with an Opinion Leader

Hypothesis 3 predicted that contact with an opinion leader is positively related to political efficacy and mobilization. Including all of the control variables, contact with an opinion leader does not have a significant main effect on internal political efficacy ( $\beta = -.04, p = .14$ ) but does have a significant main effect on external political efficacy ( $\beta = .06, p = .04$ ), political participation ( $\beta = .14, p < .0005$ ), and voter turnout ( $\text{Exp [B]} = 2.50, p < .0005$ ).

Thus the OLS regression and binary logistic regression results provide partial support for Hypothesis 3. Contact with an opinion leader is positively related to external political efficacy and mobilization but not with internal political efficacy.

### Research Question 3

Research Question 3 asked whether the relationship between contact with an opinion leader and political efficacy and mobilization is moderated by partisan identity. After controls, no interaction effects between contact with an opinion leader and partisan identity were found on internal political efficacy ( $\beta = .05, p = .11$ ), external political efficacy ( $\beta = .002, p = .94$ ), and voter turnout ( $\text{Exp [B]} = .89, p = .27$ ). However, there was a differential effect of contact with an opinion leader on political participation based on partisan identity ( $\beta = .08, p = .003$ ).

The results are therefore mixed for Research Question 3. On the one hand, the relationship between contact with an opinion leader and political efficacy and voter turnout is not moderated by partisan identity, but on the other hand, there is a significant interaction effect of contact with an opinion leader and partisan identity on political participation.

### Hypothesis 4: Being an Opinion Leader

Hypothesis 4 predicted that being an opinion leader is positively related to political efficacy and mobilization. Even with the control variables in the model, being an opinion leader was a significant predictor of internal political efficacy ( $\beta = .05, p = .05$ ), political participation ( $\beta = .17, p < .0005$ ), and voter turnout ( $\text{Exp [B]} = 1.61, p = .01$ ) but was only a marginally significant predictor of external political efficacy ( $\beta = -.05, p = .06$ ).

These results provide partial support for Hypothesis 4. Being an opinion leader has a positive relationship with internal political efficacy, political participation, and voter turnout. However, being an opinion leader is only marginally related to external political efficacy.

#### Research Question 4

Research Question 4 asked what the various characteristics of opinion leaders and non-leaders as well as those contacted by opinion leaders and those not contacted by opinions were in the context of the 2004 election. Appendix C, Table 11 presents the cross-tabulation of contact with an opinion leader and being an opinion leader. This divides the respondents into one of four categories: 1) those not contacted by an opinion leader who are not opinion leaders themselves, which I will call “no involvement” or Group 1; 2) those contacted by an opinion leader but who are not opinion leaders themselves, which I will refer to as “low involvement” or Group 2; 3) those not contacted by an opinion leader but who are opinion leaders themselves, which I will call “moderate involvement” or Group 3; and 4) those contacted by an opinion leader who are also opinion leaders, which I will refer to as “high involvement” or Group 4.

Based on these four groups, Appendix C, Table 12 presents the means for each variable used in this study as well as the results of ANOVA tests for each variable. Based on level of involvement, there is a significant difference in education (Welch statistic = 10.42,  $p < .0005$ ), age (Welch statistic = 25.28,  $p < .0005$ ), race (Welch statistic = 20.78,  $p < .0005$ ), income (Welch statistic = 19.56,  $p < .0005$ ), partisan identity (Welch statistic = 11.14,  $p < .0005$ ), battleground state (Welch statistic = 10.422,  $p < .0005$ ), media attention (Welch statistic = 26.93,  $p < .0005$ ), political discussion (Welch



statistic = 63.39,  $p < .0005$ ), internal political efficacy (Welch statistic = 8.95,  $p < .0005$ ), external political efficacy (Welch statistic = 5.52,  $p = .001$ ), political participation (Welch statistic = 54.79,  $p < .0005$ ), voter turnout (standard version) (Welch statistic = 23.90,  $p < .0005$ ), and voter turnout (experimental version) (Welch statistic = 20.03,  $p < .0005$ ).

To probe these significant results further, I did post-hoc analysis to test all possible pairwise comparisons using the Games-Howell method to correct for multiple tests. Those with no involvement (Group 1) have significantly lower levels of education on average as compared to the other three groups: those with low involvement (Group 2) ( $p = .007$ ), those with moderate involvement (Group 3) ( $p = .005$ ), and those with high involvement (Group 4) ( $p < .0005$ ). On average, the no involvement group (Group 1) is also significantly younger than Group 2 (low involvement) ( $p < .0005$ ) and Group 4 (high involvement) ( $p = .002$ ) whereas Group 2 is significantly older than Group 3 (moderate involvement) ( $p < .0005$ ) and Group 3 is significantly younger than Group 4 ( $p < .0005$ ).

In comparing the means for race among the four groups, there are significantly more nonwhites in Group 1 as compared to Group 2 ( $p < .0005$ ) and Group 4 ( $p < .0005$ ). Groups 2 is comprised of significantly fewer nonwhites than Group 3 ( $p = .006$ ), and Group 3 has significantly more nonwhites than Group 4 ( $p < .0005$ ). Also, those in the no involvement group (Group 1) have lower incomes on average as compared to each of the other groups: Group 2 ( $p < .0005$ ), Group 3 ( $p = .003$ ), and Group 4 ( $p < .0005$ ). Those in Group 3 also make less money on average than those in Group 4.

As for partisan identity, those in the no involvement group have weaker levels of partisan identity when compared to those with moderate ( $p = .004$ ) and high ( $p < .0005$ ) levels of involvement. There is also a significant difference between Group 2 and 4 in

that Group 2 has on average weaker levels of partisan identity ( $p = .004$ ). Not surprisingly, there are fewer people in the no involvement group (Group 1) living in battleground states as compared to Groups 2 ( $p < .0005$ ) and 4 ( $p < .0005$ ), the two groups that include those contacted by an opinion leader; and more people in Group 2 live in battleground states as compared to Group 3 ( $p < .0005$ ), just as fewer people in Group 3 live in battleground states as compared to Group 4 ( $p < .0005$ ).

There are lower levels of attention to campaign media among those in Group 1 as compared to Group 2 ( $p = .03$ ), Group 3 ( $p < .0005$ ), and Group 4 ( $p < .0005$ ). Those in Group 2 also have lower levels of media attention on average than those in Groups 3 ( $p = .003$ ) and 4 ( $p < .0005$ ). Those not involved also have less frequent political discussions with family and friends as compared to the other groups: Group 2 ( $p = .003$ ), Group 3 ( $p < .0005$ ), and Group 4 ( $p < .0005$ ) while those who have low levels of involvement have fewer discussions than those in Groups 3 ( $p < .0005$ ) and 4 ( $p < .0005$ ).

Again those in the no involvement group on average have lower levels of internal political efficacy than those in Group 2 ( $p = .008$ ), Group 3 ( $p < .0005$ ), and Group 4 ( $p < .0005$ ); whereas those in Group 1 have lower levels of external political efficacy as compared to Group 2 ( $p = .011$ ) and Group 4 ( $p = .001$ ). Those not involved have lower levels of political participation than those with low ( $p < .0005$ ), moderate ( $p < .0005$ ), or high ( $p < .0005$ ) levels of involvement. In addition, Group 2 participates less politically than Group 4 ( $p < .0005$ ), just as Group 3 participates less than Group 4 ( $p < .0005$ ).

Based on results from the standard question wording, significantly fewer people on average voted within the no involvement group as compared to the other three groups: Group 2 ( $p < .0005$ ), Group 3 ( $p < .0005$ ), and Group 4 ( $p < .0005$ ). Fewer people from

Group 3 voted than the number who voted from Group 4 ( $p = .015$ ). Finally, the experimental question produced similar results: again, fewer people within the no involvement group voted as compared to those with low ( $p < .0005$ ), moderate ( $p < .0005$ ), and high ( $p < .0005$ ) levels of involvement.

### Field Study

The field study results are my observations based on following volunteer opinion leaders campaigning for Senator Kerry and President Bush in the battleground state of Ohio. These observations both complement and call into question the results obtained through the secondary analysis of NES survey data. I will group my observations into several categories, starting with some background information about how the campaigns I observed operated. Then I will discuss the results of the field study as they relate to each of the opinion leadership hypotheses and research questions: Hypothesis 3, Research Question 3, Hypothesis 4, and Research Question 4. I will conclude this section of results by connecting the field study to the other methods (content analysis and survey) and to the other major concepts of this study (media framing and political discussion)

### *Background Information*

#### Volunteer Headquarters and Procedures

Not surprisingly, both parties did the bulk of their door-to-door activities on the weekends and evenings. These door-to-door campaign efforts operated rain or shine, and the volunteers were expected to complete their assignment on a given day. Volunteers would meet at the respective party headquarters or another designated location at a specific time. The volunteer coordinators would then distribute maps of different “targeted” neighborhoods, in which specific homes were identified. One or more

volunteers would be responsible for the specific neighborhood(s) to which they were assigned for that day. In addition, the volunteer coordinators would distribute campaign literature to the volunteers, instructing them to leave the literature when no one was home or to give the literature to those who were voting for their presidential candidate or were at least leaning in that direction. Sometimes volunteers were even given campaign bumper stickers, signs, or other such tokens to distribute to people who were strong Kerry or Bush supporters. Volunteers were instructed to visit only those homes on their list in the “targeted” neighborhood, meaning that the campaigns would filter the addresses in advanced based on a number of criteria. For the most part, volunteers were being sent to addresses where registered Democrats or Republicans supposedly lived. In addition, the campaigns seemed to be sending volunteers to very different types of neighborhoods. The Kerry volunteers I observed were sent to primarily lower income neighborhoods, whereas the Bush volunteers I observed were sent to primarily middle class to upper middle class neighborhoods. Volunteers were also told that should they come to a house on their list and find a yard sign for the opposing presidential candidate (or local candidates for the opposing party), they should “skip” that house and go on to the next.

### Voter Registration

During the earlier days of the campaign, before the deadline to register to vote in Ohio, the parties would have voter registration cards to hand out along with the campaign literature. One Saturday that I observed some Bush volunteers, the coordinator told the volunteers that if anyone wanted to vote for Bush and still had not registered, the volunteers could get them to fill out the voter registration card on the spot so that they

could be collected at the end of the day and literally “rushed” to the county office before the deadline on Mon.

### Volunteer Scripts

In addition to the campaign literature, campaign tokens, voter registration information (when applicable), and neighborhood map list, volunteers were also given a script which served as a guideline for what the volunteers should say to introduce themselves as they went door-to door. The scripts for each campaign were nearly identical and went something like, “Hello. My name is \_\_\_\_\_, and I’m a volunteer for \_\_\_\_\_ (Senator Kerry or President Bush). As you know, the upcoming presidential election on Nov. 2 is a very important one, and every vote will count. Can \_\_\_\_\_ (Senator Kerry or President Bush) count on your support?” In one of the scripts used by volunteers I observed, the last question asked “Can \_\_\_\_\_ count on your vote?” instead of support. I also noticed that the Bush campaign changed their script during the last 72-hours before the election. Instead of asking people whether or not they were voting for Bush, the volunteers were instructed to conclude with “I just wanted to stop by and remind you to vote on Tuesday.”

### Volunteer Check-Lists

Finally, the volunteers were given a list and required to fill in an action item for each assigned home in the targeted neighborhood. There were different number and letter codes for “not home” or “opposing candidate/party signs” or “not registered to vote,” etc. The campaign personnel were fairly strict in checking to see that a given volunteer completely filled out the list. When a volunteer returned with a list that indicated they either did not visit all of the designated homes or did not fill out the

information for each visit completely, the campaign coordinators were less than pleased. One day that I observed a specific Kerry volunteer, this volunteer returned to the campaign headquarters not having gone to each designated home. This volunteer had signed up for a specific time slot and had gone door-to-door for the entire time. But since no other volunteers were working in that neighborhood, there were just too many homes to visit. The volunteer coordinator threatened not to pay the volunteer (more on the issue of paid volunteers later) for not completing the neighborhood. Even though the volunteer was ultimately paid, this example demonstrates the fierce intensity that I often observed in the campaign headquarters, the constant pressure to knock on as many doors as possible.

### *Hypothesis 3: Contact with an Opinion Leader*

Hypothesis 3 predicted that contact with an opinion leader is positively related to political efficacy and mobilization. Many of my observations provide support for this hypothesis. For example, being visited by an opinion leader seemed to energize and encourage people that they were not alone in their concern for our country, and these interactions tended to legitimize and reinforce their belief that every vote counts. Many people thanked the volunteers for what they were doing and told the volunteers to “keep up the good work.” The college student volunteers especially received this kind of response, with comments such as “way to go!” or “it’s so nice to see young people who care enough about our country to not only vote themselves but also go out and knock on doors to encourage others to vote!” Each of these observations suggest that contact with an opinion leader increased feelings of political efficacy among the citizens with whom they interacted. In addition, after talking to a volunteer opinion leader, numerous people

asked for a campaign bumper sticker to put on their car or a sign to put in their yard, demonstrating increased political participation as a result of contact with an opinion leader.

Other observations remind us that contact with an opinion leader is not always related to political efficacy and mobilization. One volunteer I observed met an elderly person who kept saying that he or she was ashamed because he or she has never voted. The registration deadline had already passed, thus the volunteer could not get the person registered to vote. This elderly person told various details about his or her life including a number of tragic things he or she experienced. Repeatedly, this person expressed legitimate regrets for not having ever voted but felt that it would not really do any good to start now because of their age and lack of understanding concerning politics. Thus contact with an opinion leader in this case did not lead to increases in political efficacy and mobilization. If anything, the interaction most likely served as a reminder to the elderly person of his or her feelings of political inefficacy and possibly contributed to an ongoing decrease in levels of efficacy and mobilization over time.

In that same neighborhood, just a few doors down, an entire family was outdoors and upon being greeted by the opinion leader quickly stated that they were not going to vote and that none of them had voted since Ross Perot ran for president. Similarly, at times when the volunteers concluded their opening, scripted statement, “Can \_\_\_\_\_ count on your support?”, some people responded with one-line statements before slamming the door. For example, a common response was “It’s none of your business.” Both Bush and Kerry volunteers interpreted this to mean that the person was planning to vote for the opposing candidate, but it is impossible to know if this conclusion is true. Others

responded that they were not registered, that they were not voting, or that they “don’t want anything” before slamming the door. Clearly in these instances, contact with an opinion leader was not positively related to political efficacy and mobilization.

Thus while the majority of my observations supported Hypothesis 3, these negative examples serve as a reminder that the positive relationship between contact with an opinion leader and political efficacy and mobilization is not always evident. In fact, the relationship may be dependent on other factors.

### *Research Question 3*

Examining one such possible contingent factor was the goal of Research Question 3 which asked if the relationship between contact with an opinion leader and political efficacy and mobilization is moderated by partisan identity. In many ways, the examples I gave for Hypothesis 3 fit here as well in addressing Research Question 3. The key factor in whether contact with an opinion leader had a positive effect on political efficacy and mobilization seemed to be the extent to which the interaction allowed for the creation or reinforcement of a shared identity, specifically partisan identity. In all of the negative instances I presented, contact with an opinion leader did not involve a shared sense of partisan identity and may have reinforced an anti-identity instead (e.g., “we haven’t voted since we voted for Ross Perot”).

Additional examples should help to support this shared sense of partisan identity that seemingly moderated the effects of contact with an opinion leader on political efficacy and mobilization. For instance, upon meeting a volunteer supporting their candidate, many people responded enthusiastically that they were voting for Kerry or Bush. Some people named everyone in their house or all of the people in their family



(including those not living in Ohio!) who were voting for that specific candidate.

Similarly, a Kerry volunteer I observed had a lengthy discussion with an elderly person who probably did not have too many visitors and was eager to talk. This elderly person described all of the surrounding neighbors in the homes nearby and explained why each of them were “not home right now” but how they were all voting for John Kerry.

Another Kerry volunteer I observed talked with someone who expressed much more than dislike for President Bush, saying things such as “if he gets re-elected, he ought to be shot and killed” or that “he only won last time because he screwed over Florida—only got elected because his brother was governor.” For some reason, it was important for these people to connect with the volunteer opinion leaders through their shared partisan identity, whether that be a positive sense of identity in support of Bush or Kerry or whether that be a negative sense of shared identity in hatred of a specific candidate.

Thus, in answering Research Question 3, the field results suggest that the relationship between contact with an opinion leader and political efficacy and mobilization is moderated by partisan identity. These interactions may be seen as ones in which partisan identities are being reinforced in such a way that people are encouraged to feel more politically efficacious and more mobilized if they share a common partisan identity with the opinion leader.

#### *Hypothesis 4: Being an Opinion Leader*

Hypothesis 4 predicted that being an opinion leader is positively related to political efficacy and mobilization. Based on my observations, there is strong support for this hypothesis. The opinion leader volunteers were energized after going door-to-door and talking to fellow citizens. While they might have been initially discouraged after

being “rejected” with a door slamming in their face, their experience overall was nonetheless a positive one. Volunteers came away from their door-to-door campaigning excited about politics, their candidate, and glad that they had taken the time to volunteer that day. Most of these volunteers did not campaign just once. Rather, they donated many hours and days for many weeks leading up to the election. While I am sure that the desire to see their candidate win was great, I sensed that what kept these volunteers going was the personal satisfaction they felt, the increased sense of political efficacy stemming from their involvement. They felt important, as if they were doing something that they felt made a significant contribution to their candidate, their political party, and ultimately their nation.

Volunteer after volunteer made comments such as “I can’t wait to do this again” or “Just think about all the people we talked to today” or “I am sure glad that I’m a part of this,” etc. One volunteer had such a good time interacting with people in a specific neighborhood that this volunteer wanted to return there again and follow-up with the people who were “on the fence” in their vote decision for president. This volunteer was convinced that the election would be won (or lost) one vote at a time and felt proud to do his or her part. These observations suggest that, at least for these opinion leaders, their increased sense of political efficacy was motivating them to continue participating, providing support for not only the relationship between being an opinion leader and political participation but also the relationship between political efficacy and political participation.

These observations suggest that being an opinion leader is positively related to political efficacy and mobilization, thereby supporting Hypothesis 4.

#### *Research Question 4*

Research Question 4 asked what the various characteristics of opinion leaders and non-leaders are as well as those contacted by opinion leaders and those not contacted by opinion leaders. The field study observations will not allow me to answer this question completely, but I will now discuss what I learned that is pertinent in answering this question.

#### Opinion Leaders: Demographics

First, what are the various demographic characteristics of opinion leaders? In the context of the 2004 election, the Kerry and Bush volunteers that I met were fairly diverse demographically. There seemed to be an equal number of men and women volunteers, and the volunteers seemed to be from fairly diverse socioeconomic and educational backgrounds. I only observed black and white volunteers and actually never met any volunteers who were of a different race, except for the one Hispanic volunteer for Bush that I met. The volunteers seemed to be diverse in age, as well, although I noticed a rather interesting difference between the Bush volunteers and the Kerry volunteers. To my surprise, many of the Bush volunteers were college students from nearby universities, whereas the Kerry volunteers I met tended to be in their 30s or older. No doubt this had more to do with the specific area of Ohio that I observed as I suspect that in other locations, many college students were volunteering for Kerry as well.

The volunteers that I went door-to-door with fell into one of two categories: paid volunteers or unpaid volunteers. Again, probably due to the specific area of Ohio, I did not observe any Bush volunteers that were being paid, but all of the Kerry volunteers that I observed were paid, one of which I described earlier. The paid volunteers for Kerry's

campaign that I observed were all unemployed, and they not only believed in what they were doing, but they saw it as their temporary job. Many of them shared their particular story with me. Two volunteers indicated that they both lost their well-paying jobs and as a result lost their two vehicles and their home. Both were college-educated. For them, volunteering for Kerry was not just political, it was personal. They essentially blamed Bush and his policies for their unemployment and felt that electing Kerry as President would give them more job opportunities. Another volunteer was an unemployed, single parent raising three children. This volunteer had not one but two college degrees and was very thankful for even a temporary “job,” volunteering for the Kerry campaign and hoping that things would change for the better if Kerry were elected.

#### Opinion Leaders: Political Efficacy and Mobilization

Beyond these demographic characteristics of the opinion leaders, I discussed the characteristics of these opinion leaders in terms of the dependent variables of this study when addressing Hypothesis 4. They had fairly high levels of political efficacy and mobilization, and their volunteer work reinforced these characteristics. My observations suggest that these opinion leaders have higher levels of political efficacy and mobilization than those who are not opinion leaders. For example, one of the college-aged Bush volunteers that I observed did not seem to care if a particular address was assigned or if yard signs indicated that the home owner was voting for Kerry. This student was eager to talk to as many people as possible and wanted to encourage everyone to vote, even if they were planning to vote for Kerry. This student just did not want people to be sitting at home and not turning out to vote. This volunteer went beyond what was being asked of him or her. Rather than only stopping by the homes on

the list, this opinion leader went to additional homes and was eager to talk to those with opposing political views. This suggests a very high level of political efficacy and mobilization.

#### Opinion Leaders: Political Discussion

Unfortunately, none of my observations gave me a clear sense concerning the volunteers' media habits. However, I did learn some interesting things about their political discussion habits outside of the door-to-door campaigning context. For example, one of the student opinion leaders that I observed told me about how he or she was always talking to friends at school about the election and about politics. This student had a Bush/Cheney pin on his or her backpack and reportedly was ridiculed by peers for his or her political views. But, the student was still determined to keep talking to as many other high school students as possible because this student felt that getting peers motivated, interested, and excited about politics might not only affect their parents at home but might also affect these peers in the future by encouraging them to vote. This example suggests that opinion leaders more frequently discuss politics with others and that they may be more likely than others to discuss politics within heterogeneous networks of diverse political views.

In partially answering Research Question 4, these observations suggest that opinion leaders have a variety of characteristics that distinguish them from those who are not opinion leaders. The opinion leaders in this field study were fairly diverse in age, gender, race, and socioeconomic status, but the many of them were well-educated. They not only had high levels of political efficacy and mobilization but also more frequently discussed politics and did so in more heterogeneous settings.

### *The Field Study in Context*

While the field study uniquely and qualitatively addresses the opinion leadership aspect of this study, it nonetheless relates to the other methods used in this study, content analysis and survey, as well as the other major concepts, media framing and political discussion. First, the field study connects with the content analysis in that both methods bring to light different processes at work during the 2004 election. While the content analysis focuses on media, specifically the polarization frame, as a “top down” process, the field study demonstrates how “bottom up” social processes such as opinion leadership are also important. All of the people in the field study live and work in a media-saturated environment. Whether they intentionally sought out media content relating to the election or merely happened upon it as they surfed the web or television channels, it is likely that at some point most of these individuals came into contact with the polarization frame, as measured in the content analysis.

An interesting illustration of how the content analysis and media framing are connected to the field comes from the field study itself. One volunteer that I observed talked with someone who went out of their way to describe a house in that same neighborhood that had both a Bush and Kerry sign out front. One sign was labeled “His” and the other was labeled “Hers.” I find it fascinating that of all the interesting discussions we might have had about Issue 1 or the conflict in Iraq, this person was most interested in telling us that we should go down the street to see this particular house with the signs out front. The signs were consistent with how the media used the polarization frame to describe the election and American citizens as “divided” and “polarized.” Rather than defining the election in terms of specific issues, this citizen was perhaps

unknowingly defining the election in ways that were consistent with the polarization frame.

Secondly, the field study has a number of connections with the survey data and with political discussion. As stated previously, the field study observations both complement and call into question the results obtained through the secondary analysis of NES data. For example, the field study suggests that both contact with an opinion leader and being an opinion leader are positively related to political efficacy. However, the survey data produced mixed results: contact with an opinion leader was not related to internal political efficacy but was significantly related to external political efficacy. The reverse was true for being an opinion leader, which had a significant, positive relationship with internal political efficacy but only a marginally significant relationship with external political efficacy.

While some might argue that having more than one method complicates the results, having two different methods can bring increased confidence in the results. Both the field study and the survey provide strong support for the relationship between opinion leadership and political participation as well as the moderating role of partisan identity. Both the field study and the survey compliment one another in bringing to light the various characteristics of the volunteer opinion leaders during the 2004 election. The field study also provides theoretical and conceptual support for a deeper understanding of political discussion. While the survey data considers political discussion among family and friends, my observations of the volunteers going door-to-door nonetheless provided evidence for the nature of political discussions, how both identities and anti-identities play an important role and are constantly being shaped and reinforced during interactions.

In summary, these opinion leader volunteers served a unique function in the “bottom up” processes of the 2004 election and ultimately in the outcome of the 2004 election, with many states such as Ohio boasting record voter turnout. But as these observations illustrate, not everyone benefited from these interactions. For some, especially the volunteers and those who developed a shared identity with them, it was a positive experience; for others, the political process was not as positive. Some people made themselves unreachable by slamming the door; others were labeled as unreachable in advance and thus were not included on the lists of “targeted” neighborhoods or “designated” homes. The political campaigns seemed to hold to the philosophy that they should spend time with only those that they determined in advance might vote for their candidate and ignore the rest.

While this philosophy has always characterized political parties, even makes intuitive sense, and seems pragmatically necessary in such a large-scale, get-out-the-vote effort, it does not change the fact that the political system has left and continues to leave out a number of people. These people are the untold story of the 2004 Presidential campaign—they are the forgotten ones amidst all of the euphoria over record turnout. If more and more citizens are to be mobilized in the future and we are to continue experiencing record-breaking voter turnout, the political parties and campaigns will have to begin reaching out to all people in an effort to build bridges and help those who have never voted—who think it is too late to start—believe that they, too, can make a difference. These grassroots campaign efforts have certainly empowered the volunteer opinion leaders through a shared sense of identity with many citizens. Perhaps these opinion leaders hold the key to empowering others even more.



## Summary of Findings

Appendix C, Table 13 provides a summary of each hypothesis and research question tested as well as the type of results obtained for each. First, one research question and several hypotheses examined the role of media framing as a “top down” process during the 2004 election. Research Question 1 asked about the frequency of the polarization frame during the 2004 election, and the content analysis revealed that the polarization frame was used in media coverage quite frequently across different news sources. Hypothesis 1, predicting that attention to media coverage of the campaign is positively related to political efficacy and mobilization, was supported. In addition, H1a which predicted an interaction between media attention and partisan identity was partially supported.

Secondly, one hypothesis and one research question considered the role of political discussion among family and friends as a “bottom up” process of the 2004 election. Hypothesis 2 was supported: frequency of political discussion with family and friends is positively related to political efficacy and mobilization. Analysis of the NES data produced mixed results for Research Question regarding the moderating effect of partisan identity.

Finally, two hypotheses and two research questions were posed regarding opinion leadership’s role as a “bottom up” process at work during the election. Hypothesis 3, predicting that contact with an opinion leader is positively related to political efficacy and mobilization, was partially supported, whereas Research Question 3 concerning the moderating effect of partisan identity produced mixed results. In addition, Hypothesis 4 which stated that being an opinion leader is positively related to political efficacy and

mobilization received partial support. In addressing Research Question 4, ANOVA tests and post-hoc comparisons revealed a number of significant differences between opinion leaders and non-leaders as well as those contacted by opinion leaders and those not contacted by opinion leaders.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In this final chapter, I will discuss the results of this study in terms of both replication and extension of existing communication research, describe the lessons learned in writing this dissertation including the various limitations, and suggest how future research might address these limitations and perhaps build upon the findings of this study.

#### Results

The purpose of this study was to examine the 2004 election, both the “top-down” process of media framing and “bottom-up” processes of political discussion and opinion leadership (Walsh, 2004), by integrating the research areas of framing, social identity, political discussion, and opinion leadership. In addition to replicating prior research, this study extended these areas of research to consider the possible differential effects that these “top down” and “bottom up” processes may have had on political efficacy and mobilization based on partisan identity. To accomplish this goal, I conducted a quantitative content analysis of media with some qualitative observations, a secondary analysis of NES survey data, and a field study of the volunteer opinion leaders for the political campaigns.

Examining the media content during the two months prior to the election, I found that the polarization frame was used quite frequently across two different types of media, newspapers and television. While the use of the polarization frame did not seem to vary over time during those two months, certain key words and phrases indicating the presence of the polarization frame were more prominent in news coverage. The campaign media portrayed the nation as consisting of blue states, red states, and battleground states; as a nation sharply divided; as a nation consisting of a polarized electorate, split 50/50; as a nation of clashing cultures; as a nation filled with bitter, angry people. Thus the polarization frame as measured in this study was used frequently in the 2004 election campaign media coverage.

To consider how this media framing of the 2004 election might have affected political efficacy and mobilization, I conducted several analyses using the NES survey data. The results indicate that attention to media coverage of the campaign was a significant predictor of political efficacy and mobilization and that there is a positive relationship between attention to media coverage of the campaign and political efficacy and mobilization, supporting Hypothesis 1. These results are consistent with countless studies indicating that media attention plays an important role in helping people to have higher levels of political efficacy and mobilization (e.g., Beaudoin & Thorson, 2004; Hofstetter et al., 2001; Kim et al., 1999; Miller & Reese, 1982; Pinkleton et al., 1998; Scheufele, 2000, 2002; Scheufele et al., 2004)

Because the indirect nature of the survey measure for media attention is insufficient evidence for the results of Hypothesis 1 to be considered a framing effect, I then investigated whether this relationship differs based on partisan identity. The

relationship between attention to media coverage of the campaign and political efficacy is not moderated by partisan identity. However, there is a significant interaction effect of media attention and partisan identity on both political participation and voter turnout. Taking the results of the content analysis under consideration, this interaction effect may be evidence that the polarization frame may have a differential effect on levels of participation and turnout based on partisan identity thus providing validation for both Fiorina's (2005) work on the polarization frame and Walsh's (2004) work on the role of social or group-based identity in the media framing process. Perhaps "[elite] framing in terms of social groups is persuasive not because social groups exist out there but because individuals have developed identities and anti-identities with categories of people" (Walsh, 2004, p. 174). However, because the survey does not provide a measure of exposure to the polarization frame, it is impossible to conclude definitively that the observed relationship between media attention and political mobilization as mediated by partisan identity can be attributed to the polarization frame. There are potentially many explanations for the results pertaining to media attention, and thus future investigation is warranted. The mixed results for Hypothesis 1a suggest that while the effect of media attention on political efficacy may not differ based on partisan identity, the effect of media attention on political participation and voter turnout does depend on partisan identity.

The second set of survey analyses considered the role of political discussion as a "bottom up" process during the 2004 election by specifically testing the relationship between frequency of political discussion with family and friends and political efficacy and mobilization. Frequency of political discussion with family and friends has a

positive relationship with political efficacy and mobilization, thus providing support for Hypothesis 2. Much like the results for Hypothesis 1, these results replicate prior research concerning how political discussion can foster more political efficacy and mobilization among citizens (e.g., Burkhalter et al., 2002; Conover et al., 2002; Hofstetter et al., 2001; Lazarsfeld et al., 1944; McLeod et al., 1999b; Pattie & Johnston, 2002; Scheufele et al., 2003; Straits, 1990).

Research Question 2 extended this prior work on political discussion to consider how partisan identity might serve as a moderating factor. The results were mixed. While there is no interaction effect of political discussion and partisan identity on political efficacy and voter turnout, the effect of political discussion on political participation is moderated by partisan identity. This suggests that at least in part political discussions among family and friends during the 2004 election were important for citizens in the ongoing process of “defining themselves” and others “as particular kinds of people” (Walsh, 2004, p. 8). In an election context, these discussions may serve to reinforce the extent to which citizens identify themselves as a member of one of the two main political parties or as someone who does not belong to either of those parties. At least where political participation is concerned, it seems that political discussions have a differential effect based on partisan identity that is potentially being reinforced in those discussions.

Regarding opinion leadership and its role as a “bottom up” process of the 2004 election, additional tests were conducted to understand how both contact with an opinion leader and being an opinion leader relate to political efficacy and mobilization. First, Hypothesis 3, predicting that contact with an opinion leader is positively related to both political efficacy and mobilization, was partially supported. More specifically, the survey

results suggest that contact with an opinion leader is positively related to external political efficacy and mobilization but not with internal political efficacy. Despite the mixed results, the importance of contact with an opinion leader during the 2004 election is not diminished. Just as prior work on opinion leadership suggests, contact with an opinion leader is often associated with higher levels of political efficacy and mobilization, suggesting once again how influential opinion leaders can be during an election campaign (e.g., Burt, 1999; Lazarsfeld et al., 1944; Robinson, 1976; Weimann, 1994).

The purpose of Research Question 3 was to extend this area of research to consider how the relationship between contact with an opinion leader and political efficacy and mobilization may be moderated by partisan identity. Analysis of NES data provided mixed for Research Question 3. On the one hand, the relationship between contact with an opinion leader and political efficacy and voter turnout is not moderated by partisan identity, but on the other hand, there is a significant interaction effect of contact with an opinion leader and partisan identity on political participation. This is consistent with the results concerning political discussion's effect on political participation suggesting that the discussions between opinion leaders and citizens during the 2004 election can be understood as interactions producing and reinforcing social identities. It is through these "casual interactions" that "people accomplish the civically desirable work of connecting themselves to politics. . . . But the dark side of this interaction . . . clarifies attachments to specific social groups and reinforces the boundaries of 'us' and 'them,' producing collective understandings that are not necessarily democratic goods" (Walsh, 2004, p. 8). As with political discussion among

family and friends, it is possible that those who had contact with an opinion leader may have responded differently to those interactions based on the strength of their partisan identity. Thus contact with an opinion leader, much like political discussion, may be seen as affecting political participation differently depending on partisan identity.

Secondly, this study also investigated how being an opinion leader was important to the “bottom up” processes of the election. Being an opinion leader has a positive relationship with internal political efficacy, political participation, and voter turnout. However, being an opinion leader is only marginally related to external political efficacy. Thus Hypothesis 4 was only partially supported. Despite the mixed support, the present study of the 2004 election nonetheless replicates past research concerning the relationship between being an opinion leader and one’s levels of political efficacy and mobilization (e.g., Kingdon, 1970; Lazarsfeld et al., 1944; Weimann, 1994).

Examining the characteristics of opinion leaders and non-leaders as well as those who had contact with an opinion leader and those who did not, the results for Research Question 4 confirm prior opinion leadership research and provide a number of interesting comparisons among these groups. Much like opinion leaders of the past, opinion leaders of the 2004 presidential election tended to have higher levels of education, paid more attention to media coverage of the campaign, more frequently discussed politics with family and friends, and had higher levels of political participation (Weimann, 1994).

The field study results lend additional support to the importance of opinion leaders as well as political discussion in the “bottom up” processes of the 2004 election. Specifically, the field study provided additional evidence in testing Hypothesis 3, Research Question 3, Hypothesis 4, and Research Question 4. Many of my observations



suggest that contact with an opinion leader has a positive relationship with political efficacy and mobilization. For example, being visited by an opinion leader seemed to energize and encourage people that they were not alone in their concern for our country, and these interactions tended to legitimize and reinforce their belief that every vote counts, thereby increasing political efficacy. In addition, after talking to a volunteer opinion leader, numerous people asked for a campaign bumper sticker to put on their car or a sign to put in their yard, demonstrating increased political participation as a result of contact with an opinion leader. Unfortunately, not all of the observations included these positive effects. Sometimes people slammed doors in the faces of the opinion leaders when they tried to talk to them; others quickly retorted that they never vote or that they disliked both candidates. Thus while the majority of my observations supported Hypothesis 3, these negative examples are a reminder that the positive relationship between contact with an opinion leader and political efficacy and mobilization is not always evident. In fact, the relationship may be dependent on other factors.

Thus the field study also addressed Research Question 3 which asked if the relationship between contact with an opinion leader and political efficacy and mobilization is moderated by partisan identity. In many ways, the same observations that helped to address Hypothesis 3 also fit here as well in addressing Research Question 3. The key factor in whether contact with an opinion leader had a positive effect on political efficacy and mobilization seemed to be the extent to which the interaction allowed for the creation or reinforcement of a shared identity, specifically partisan identity. In all of the negative observation, where contact leader did not have a positive effect, there was no shared sense of partisan identity. Rather, the interactions between the opinion leaders

and those they visited may have reinforced an anti-identity instead (e.g., “we haven’t voted since we voted for Ross Perot”). In answering Research Question 3, the field results suggest that the relationship between contact with an opinion leader and political efficacy and mobilization is moderated by partisan identity.

Additional observations suggested that being an opinion leader is positively related to political efficacy and mobilization. The opinion leader volunteers tended to be energized after going door-to-door and talking to fellow citizens. I sensed that what kept these volunteers going was the personal satisfaction they felt, the increased sense of political efficacy stemming from their involvement. Volunteer after volunteer made comments such as “I can’t wait to do this again” or “Just think about all the people we talked to today” or “I am sure glad that I’m a part of this,” etc. The field study results suggest that, at least for these opinion leaders, their increased sense of political efficacy was motivating them to continue participating, providing support for not only the relationship between being an opinion leader and political participation but also the relationship between political efficacy and political participation.

Finally, although the field study observations did not allow me to answer Research Question 4 completely, there is evidence especially concerning the characteristics of opinion leaders. The opinion leaders in this field study were fairly diverse in age, gender, race, and socioeconomic status, and many of them were well-educated. They had fairly high levels of political efficacy and mobilization, and their volunteer work reinforced these characteristics. My observations suggest that these opinion leaders have higher levels of political efficacy and mobilization than those who are not opinion leaders. In addition, my interactions with the volunteers suggest that

opinion leaders more frequently discuss politics with others and that they may be more likely than others to discuss politics within heterogeneous networks of diverse political views.

The three methods together help to illustrate the importance of both “top down” processes such as media framing and “bottom up” processes such as political discussion and opinion leadership in a context such as the 2004 Presidential election. How the media frames the election campaign will no doubt have important consequences, and the content analysis revealed that the polarization frame was used frequently during the 2004 election. As illustrated in the media content analysis, the polarization frame, by its very nature, uses language that may facilitate the development of identities and anti-identities among those who do and do not fall into the “blue camp” or “red camp.” The survey results suggest that there are differential effects of media attention on political participation and voter turnout based on partisan identity. But mass media effects are not the only area in which social identity is important. Both the survey and field study results provide evidence that the effects of political discussion and contact with an opinion leader on political participation depend on partisan identity. Because of the central importance of social identity, specifically partisan identity, in a context such as the 2004 election, politicians and journalists and campaign workers and ordinary citizens should be conscious of how their actions and their words affect those around them. If Walsh’s (2004) analysis is correct, one plausible interpretation of these findings is that it is possible to build and reinforce positive identities with one another via both mass and interpersonal communication processes, but it is also possible to build and reinforce anti-

identities with one another that may lead to decreases in political participation and voter turnout.

## Lessons Learned and Limitations

### *Content Analysis*

Through the process of designing and implementing this study as well as analyzing the results, I have learned a number of important conceptual and methodological lessons. First, there are some severe limitations associated with the content analysis and framing portion of this study. Because of the design of the content analysis, it is impossible to determine whether the presence of key words and phrases associated with the polarization frame (Fiorina, 2005) is really evidence of media framing. For instance, it is possible that these key words or phrases were mentioned in any given article but that in actuality, another frame was being used. Or, it is possible that the polarization frame may have been used but that another frame was contained in the same article. It may even be that another frame in the story was the dominant frame and that any mention or reference to the polarization frame was of minor importance to the article. The design of the content analysis simply does not allow for any comparisons with other frames, and it does not provide definitive evidence that the polarization frame was the most important or dominant frame in any given article.

Having completed the content analysis and observing its limitations, I believe now that I should have put something on the coding sheet to allow me to determine whether or not other frames were present in the story and what the relative importance of those frames was as compared to the polarization frame. It may have been helpful to only content analyze the lead paragraph or the first several paragraphs rather than the

entire article as that, too, may have affected the results. The presence of the polarization frame within the first few paragraphs would provide more evidence of its importance to that news article. Something simple that I should have included is the type of news article and its location. A news story on the front page is potentially different from one buried in the middle of the newspaper or an opinion piece. Also, the coding sheet did not allow coders to indicate how many times a given word or phrase appeared. Thus “polarized nation” or “bitterly divided” may have occurred only once or may have occurred repeatedly throughout a news story, but the coding sheet only indicates that the phrase occurred, not how frequently. These are just a few of the many things I have learned from the content analysis portion of the study.

#### Survey

Relatedly, there are a number of issues concerning the link or lack thereof between the content analysis and the survey data. As previously discussed, the survey did not allow for a direct way to measure exposure to the polarization frame. Thus, the content analysis was designed to determine the overall frequency of the polarization frame in campaign news stories so that attention to media coverage of the campaign in the survey could be an indirect measure of exposure to the polarization frame. The logic here was that if the polarization frame was very prevalent in campaign news coverage (and it was, according to the content analysis results), those people paying attention to campaign media would have been exposed to the polarization frame. Thus any effects due to attention to media coverage of the campaign could be attributed indirectly to the polarization frame. Not only did the content analysis provide somewhat limited evidence regarding the polarization frame, but also the survey analysis was unable to prove that the

relationships observed between media attention and political efficacy and mobilization had anything to do with the polarization frame. There was a significant interaction effect of media attention and partisan identity on political participation and voter turnout. However, it is impossible to truly link this result to the polarization frame or know definitely the reason for these observed relationships. Given the inability to directly measure exposure to the polarization frame, which was not even measured very well in the content analysis, this study cannot provide a conclusive answer and caution is warranted in interpreting the findings..

A related limitation is that the indirect nature of the media attention measure does not allow me to rule out alternate causes or explanations for the observed media effects. As stated previously, it is impossible to determine whether the main effect of media attention on political efficacy and mobilization is due in any part to the polarization frame. For example, the O-S-O-R model is one plausible explanation for the effect of various media measures on political participation (Markus & Zajonc, 1985). While the hypothesized interaction between media attention and partisan identity on political participation and voter turnout was significant, one severe limitation of this study is the inability to rule out alternative explanations for the observed relationships concerning media attention.

Another measurement issue with the NES data was that the only item available for assessing political discussion was a “frequency” measure. While there is evidence to suggest that the content of political discussions is as important if not more important than mere frequency (Hoffman et al., 2005; Walsh, 2004), the limitation is even greater because the survey item asks whether respondents ever discuss “politics” with family and

friends. A better frequency measure for this study would have been a direct measure of discussion about the 2004 election for two reasons. First, such a measure would have been more consistent with the other measures in this study that were specific to the election (e.g., media attention and opinion leadership). Secondly, such a measure would probably have produced more accurate results since recent research suggests that when asking people about how frequently they discuss politics, the generic term “politics” is not specific enough and therefore has different meanings for different people (Sietman, Thomson, Glynn, & Reinke, 2005).

As discussed in the literature review, measuring opinion leadership has always been problematic (e.g., Silk, 1971). I tried to assess opinion leadership in two ways: first, by examining contact with an opinion leader and second, by considering the role of being an opinion leader. Again, the NES variables are somewhat limiting. The only means I had for measuring the impact of contact with an opinion leader were two questions which asked respondents whether they had been contacted by someone from one of the political parties or anyone else supporting specific candidates. The volunteers possessed two key characteristics which suggest that they are one type of opinion leader: influencing others in a given context and the observed desire to mobilize people who will spread that to others (Roch, 2005). A strength of this measurement is that the items connect fairly well with the field study I conducted, but these volunteers are not the only opinion leaders that potentially influenced political efficacy and mobilization. While I tried to account for this by using a measure of “being an opinion leader” which asks respondents whether they ever tried to persuade others to vote for or against a particular party or candidate, it is impossible for me to determine what impact if any these kinds of people had.

The comparisons from Research Question 4 among differing levels of involvement based on how respondents answered the opinion leadership items are very clear in demonstrating a number of significant differences. Those who serve a functional role as an opinion leader who were also contacted by someone representing a political party or candidate (Group 4) are significantly more educated, more partisan, pay more attention to media, discuss politics more frequently, and have higher levels of political efficacy and mobilization than those in Group 1 who were not contacted someone and who did not try to persuade others to vote for or against a particular party or candidate. If the people in Group 4 are so different from the people in Group 1, this suggests that there may be an even greater impact due to opinion leaders than even the results of this study indicate.

Another limitation stems from the fact that all but one of the key concepts examined in this study—including overall campaign media attention, political discussion, opinion leadership, political efficacy and mobilization—were only included in Wave 2 of the NES survey. As a result, this study could not take full advantage of the time series data and the subsequent analysis is equivalent to a one-shot case study. The content analysis and field study were both conducted over time to enhance the ability to observe the media framing as a “top down” process and political discussion and opinion leadership as “bottom up” processes; however, the survey analysis is limited in its ability to accomplish this objective because of the nature of the Wave 1 and Wave 2 data. The measurement of variables such as political efficacy at Time 2 pose a problem as well in that the outcome of the election very well could have affected respondent’s answers.



A related issue is the potential impact of panel mortality on the survey results. Appendix C, Table 5 presents the means for a number of variables comparing the respondents who only participated in Wave 1 of the study with those who participated in both waves. For example, 36% of respondents who completed both waves of the study live in battleground states whereas only 25% of those who dropped out lived in battleground states. This suggests that people living in battleground states were more likely to complete the survey and were therefore answering the survey items measuring the key concepts of this study. Because of the potentially high levels of campaign intensity as discussed in the literature review (Abramowitz & Segal, 1992), those people living in the battleground states may have been paying more attention to media, discussing politics more, being contacted by opinion leaders more, and may have had higher levels of political efficacy and mobilization. If this is true, the survey results were directly impacted by panel mortality. In addition, it appears that Democrats and/or Independents were more likely to drop out. The mean for those who dropped out was 1.18 (0 being Republican, 1 being Independents and others, 2 being Democrat) but for those who completed both interviews, the mean was 1.01. Sixty percent of those that dropped out were women, as compared 52% of female respondents who completed the survey. Finally, only 26% of those that completed the survey were non-whites, but 34% of those that dropped out were non-whites. Just as the number of people in battleground states no doubt influenced the survey results, the panel mortality associated with the party identification, gender, and race of respondents is also problematic.

The voter turnout measures were a limitation as well as a frustration. Essentially, NES “split” the sample by randomly asking half of the respondents the standard version

of the voter turnout measure and asking the other half an experimental version. No doubt the experimental version was designed to reduce survey response bias due to social desirability. Indeed, there were approximately 7% fewer “yes” responses from those asked the experimental version. On the one hand, this may be a positive indication that NES has found a better measure of voter turnout. On the other hand, this severely complicated the analysis for this study. I combined the two voter turnout measures with some hesitation and then controlled for question wording in the multivariate analyses. Not surprisingly, question wording had a significant effect (see Appendix C, Table 10). While combining the items was a less than desirable remedy, it was quite necessary when compared to the alternative of conducting separate analyses.

Given the severe limitations of the NES survey data, a number of which I have not even mentioned, I will probably think twice before resorting to this sort of secondary analysis again in the near future, especially if I plan to include media framing as an important concept. If I could design my own national survey and include any items that are important to this study, I would first include several measures designed to test for an effect of the polarization frame. In addition to several campaign media attention measures, I would ask respondents to answer a number of questions concerning their perceptions of the United States as a “divided” or “polarized” nation, how they feel about the blue state vs. red state dichotomy, the extent to which they feel that there is a culture war being fought between the two main political factions in the U.S., and various other items to examine the way in which they do or do not identify with various aspects of the polarization frame as evident in news coverage of the election.

In addition, I would include a variety of interpersonal items designed to measure both political discussion and opinion leadership. For example, I would want to include several other aspects of discussion besides frequency such as the extent to which the respondents exchanged opinions vs. information when discussing political issues with others, which was proven to be a more significant aspect of the public opinion process in a recent study (Hoffman et al., 2005). I would also want to include political discussion items specific to discussion of the campaign as opposed to the generic “do you discuss politics” question. In asking about contact with opinion leaders, I would use more specific questions than were included in the NES. I would want to find out whether the person was contacted by telephone or whether the opinion leader visited their home. I would want to know the respondent’s reaction to the opinion leader’s visit and whether the respondent found the interaction to be helpful or gratifying in any way. I would want to include additional measures of the functional role of opinion leadership such as the extent to which others ask the respondent for advice.

I would also make sure that the items relevant to my study were asked at both Time 1 and Time 2. In cases where this would not be possible, I would at least ask related questions so that I could attempt to better address the causal ordering of the variables and take full advantage of the panel data. And unless I had a strong, theoretical reason for doing so, I would be unlikely to “split” my sample with two very different items measuring the same variable if that variable were one of the key variables for my study, such as voter turnout was in this study.

Even though I would do things differently if possible and admit the various limitations associated with the measurement and interpretation of the survey analyses, the

NES data is still a well-respected, useful, and powerful resource that provides information from a national, representative sample. Many of the limitations I have identified are due in part to the fact that the data set is simply not optimized for communication research. As long as the limitations are identified and understood, the results of this study in terms of the secondary analysis of NES data are still meaningful and provide interesting insight into the 2004 Presidential election. .

### *Field Study*

One limitation to the field study I conducted stemmed from my inability to carry out the research as originally planned. When initially designing the study, I planned to obtain permission from the participants to record their conversations. My original idea was that I could specifically study the frames in conversation by doing a quantitative content analysis of the interactions between volunteer opinion leaders and the citizens they visited going door-to-door. However, upon entering the field, it became obvious to me that this would be too cumbersome and too intrusive considering that so many of the interactions were brief, lacking any useful conversational element and considering that the volunteer opinion leaders relied on their scripts for the most part. When conversations extended beyond the scripted information, I was able to take enough detailed notes following the interaction that using the tape recorder seemed unnecessary. Because this specific context did not allow for the original design, the field study is limited to qualitative observations. If the tape recorder had been feasible, the field study would have produced both qualitative and quantitative results, thereby potentially increasing their strength.

If I had known from the beginning that my original research design would not work for the field study, I could have attempted to gain similar information in a different way. For example, in addition to following the volunteers as they went door-to-door, I could have arranged for immediate follow-up interviews with both the volunteers and the people with whom they interacted. I could have asked about perceptions concerning the interactions (how beneficial, interesting, informative, etc.), perceptions of the other person and how similar or different from self, feelings of political efficacy, desire to volunteer again (or be visited again), and questions designed specifically to elicit frames in conversation concerning the election itself or some specific political issue.

Also, since the conversations that I observed did not pertain to any specific issues, I would consider asking the volunteers to bring up various topics when the other person seemed inclined to talk. While in the majority of cases, even nice people were not likely to engage in long discussions, there were a number of instances when, if the volunteer had mentioned something specific concerning an issue, the conversation might have lasted a bit longer and dealt with more substantial issues of the campaign. These types of conversations would be very useful to the extent that I could observe more readily how the individuals were framing the issue.

#### Future Research

While this study attempts to answer a number of questions about the “top down” and “bottom up” processes of the 2004 election, it also raises a number of questions that future research could potentially address. The first two areas for future research are related to the limitations of the study as previously discussed. Considering that this study could not measure exposure to the polarization frame directly and hence resorted to

considering the role of media attention which failed to prove a link between the polarization frame and political efficacy and mobilization, future scholars should consider doing an experiment to more directly measure the effects of the polarization frame. Such an experiment would not only be a better way to examine the polarization frame, it would also allow for causal inferences that are not possible in the current study. Secondly, more and better measures of political discussion should be included in survey research. This study, along with numerous others (Gamson, 1992; Kim et al., 1999; Scheufele, 2002; Walsh, 2004), provides evidence that political discussions have real and important consequences. But as long as we are limited to generic frequency of discussion measures, we will not obtain a more complete understanding of political discussion, as recent research suggests (Hoffman et al., 2005; Sietman et al., 2005).

Scholars should also continue to examine the polarization frame in content analyses. The purpose of this study was to empirically identify both the existence of frequency of the polarization frame during the 2004 election. However, there are many additional questions left to be addressed as discussed in the previous section on limitations and lessons learned. For example, this study examined the overall frequency of the polarization frame across news stories but did not identify the frequency of the polarization frame within new stories. Some news stories seemed to use the polarization frame repeatedly throughout the entire story; others used the polarization frame in a specific section of the story only, such as the opening paragraph or later in the story. Identifying the prevalence of the polarization frame within stories, comparing its use with other news frames, and considering its prominence in a given news story may be a first step in understanding more about what the polarization frame is and what effects it might

have. Thus further investigation is warranted. In addition, this study involves the polarization frame in one context—the 2004 election. It may be that the polarization frame will be and is being used in a variety of other contexts that would be interesting to examine.

Another idea for future researchers of election campaigns to consider would be to do follow-up interviews with volunteer opinion leaders after an election. As the results of both the field study and the survey analysis suggest, opinion leaders experience an increased sense of political efficacy as a result of their campaign activities. However, nothing in this study indicates how losing an election may affect this increased political efficacy. For example, we do not know how the Kerry volunteers felt after President Bush was declared the winner. Did they feel that the many hours, days, and months they devoted were wasted and did they experience a decrease in political efficacy? This study cannot address this question, but future research potentially could.

Some of the key findings of this study were the interaction effects of media attention and partisan identity on political participation and voter turnout, political discussion and partisan identity on political participation, and contact with an opinion leader and partisan identity on political participation. I have provided one possible explanation for these observed relationships, suggesting that social identities are playing a central role in these processes. While this study cannot rule out alternative explanations, especially where media attention is concerned, the findings do echo Walsh's (2004) work on the importance of identities. Future studies in political communication, public opinion, and related fields should explore and test these relationships further. The findings of this study, while far from conclusive, should be

investigated in an effort to validate or disprove them and to provide further evidence concerning the role of partisan identity.

One final suggestion for future scholars stems from a potential strength of this study. I attempted to provide a unique blending of both qualitative and quantitative methods in designing this study. While certainly not without its limitations, I did this to facilitate more integration between these methodological techniques. Both qualitative and quantitative methods have their inherent strengths and weaknesses. By incorporating both into this study, it is my hope that the results are not only more reliable and valid but also more persuasive. I will continue to challenge myself to produce this kind of research—research that surrounds questions with multiple perspectives in an attempt to answer those questions more fully. In this way, I desire to be a positive example for future communication scholars in the same way that those before me have inspired me.



APPENDIX A  
SURVEY ITEMS

The following is a list of variables used in this study along with the corresponding NES variable numbers, survey items, and response categories taken from the 2004 NES pre-election and post-election questionnaires.

**Attention to Campaign Media**

V045006: In general, how much attention did you pay to news about the campaign for President—a great deal, quite a bit, some, very little, or none?

- (5) a great deal
- (4) quite a bit
- (3) some
- (2) very little
- (1) none

**Frequency of Political Discussion**

V045153: Do you ever discuss politics with your family or friends?

- (1) yes
- (0) no

V045153a: How many days in the past week did you talk about politics with family or friends?

Coded by number of days: 0-7

### **Contact with Opinion Leader**

V045008: Did anyone from one of the political parties call you up or come around and talk to you about the campaign this year?

- (1) yes
- (0) no

V045009: Other than someone from the two major parties, did anyone (else) call you up or come around and talk to you about supporting specific candidates in this last election?

- (1) yes
- (0) no

### **Being an Opinion Leader**

V045010: During the campaign, did you talk to any people and try to show them why they should vote for or against one of the parties or candidates?

- (1) yes
- (0) no

### **Party Identification**

V043114: Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or what?

- (2) Democrat
- (1) Independent/Other
- (0) Republican

### **Battleground State**

V041201a: Sampling information indicating respondents' state

- (1) yes (indicating respondents' state is a battleground state)
- (0) no

### **Education**

V043252: What is the highest grade of school or year of college you have completed?

Coded by number of years: 0 years of education, 1 year of education, etc. up to 17, which indicates 17 years of education and up.

## **Gender**

V041109a: Is respondent male or female?

- (1) female
- (0) male

## **Age**

V043250: What is the month, day and year of your birth?

NES summary variable which codes age in number of years

## **Race**

V043299: What racial or ethnic group or groups best describes you?

- (1) Nonwhite
- (0) White

## **Income**

V043293x: Please look at the booklet and tell me the letter of the income group that includes the income of all members of your family living here in 2003 before taxes. This figure should include salaries, wages, pensions, dividends, interest, and all other income.

- (23) \$120,000 and up
- (22) \$105,000-119,999
- (21) \$90,000-104,999
- (20) \$80,000-89,999
- (19) \$70,000-79,999
- (18) \$60,000-69,999
- (17) \$50,000-59,999
- (16) \$45,000-49,999
- (15) \$40,000-44,999
- (14) \$35,000-39,999
- (13) \$30,000-34,999
- (12) \$25,000-29,999
- (11) \$22,000-24,999
- (10) \$20,000-21,999
- (9) \$17,000-19,999
- (8) \$15,000-16,999
- (7) \$13,000-14,999
- (6) \$11,000-12,999
- (5) \$9,000-10,999

- (4) \$7,000-8,999
- (3) \$5,000-6,999
- (2) \$3,000-4,999
- (1) none - \$2,999

### **Internal Political Efficacy**

V045243: Some people say that no matter who people vote for, it won't make any different to what happens. Others say that who people vote for can make a difference to what happens. Using the scale on this card, where would you place yourself?

- (5) Who people vote for can make a difference
- (4)
- (3)
- (2)
- (1) Who people vote for won't make a difference

### **External Political Efficacy**

V045201: Public officials don't care much what people like me think.

- (5) Disagree strongly
- (4) Disagree somewhat
- (3) Neither agree nor disagree
- (2) Agree somewhat
- (1) Agree strongly

V045202: People like me don't have any say about what the government does.

- (5) Disagree strongly
- (4) Disagree somewhat
- (3) Neither agree nor disagree
- (2) Agree somewhat
- (1) Agree strongly

V045203: Over the years, how much attention do you feel the government pays to what people think when it decides what to do?

- (5) a great deal
- (4) quite a bit
- (3) some
- (2) very little
- (1) none

V045204: How much do you feel that having elections makes the government pay attention to what the people think?

- (5) Disagree strongly
- (4) Disagree somewhat
- (3) Neither agree nor disagree
- (2) Agree somewhat
- (1) Agree strongly

### **Political Participation**

V045011: Did you go to any political meetings, rallies, speeches, dinners, or things like that in support of a particular candidate?

- (1) yes
- (0) no

V045012: Did you wear a campaign button, put a campaign sticker on your car, or place a sign in your window or in front of your house?

- (1) yes
- (0) no

V045013: Did you do any (other) work for one of the parties or candidates?

- (1) yes
- (0) no

V045014: During an election year people are often asked to make a contribution to support campaigns. Did you give money to an individual candidate running for public office?

- (1) yes
- (0) no

V045015: Did you give money to a political party during this election year?

- (1) yes
- (0) no

V045016: Did you give any money to any other group that supported or opposed candidates?

- (1) yes
- (0) no

V045266: During the past twelve months, have you telephoned, written a letter to, or visited a government official to express your views on a public issue?

- (1) yes
- (0) no

V045267: Aside from a strike against your employer, in the past twelve months, have you taken part in a protest, march, or demonstration on some national or local issue?

- (1) yes
- (0) no

### **Voter Turnout**

In talking to people about elections, we often find that a lot of people were not able to vote because they weren't registered, they were sick, or they just didn't have time.

V045017a: Standard version: How about you—did you vote in the elections this November?

- (1) yes
- (0) no

V045017b: Experimental version: Which of the following statements best describes you: One, I did not vote (in the election this November); Two, I thought about voting this time—but didn't; Three, I usually vote, but didn't this time; or Four, I am sure I voted?

- (1) yes
- (0) no

APPENDIX B  
CODING SHEET

Each article or transcript randomly selected for inclusion in the content analysis should be coded for each of the following variables.

V1. Story identification number \_\_\_\_\_

V2. Story day (month, day, year) \_\_\_\_\_

V3. Source name \_\_\_\_\_

V4. Polarization frame: For each of the following keywords, catchphrases, and symbols, please answer “yes” or “no” if contained within the story (including headlines and captions).

1. Map of the U.S. showing “blue” states and “red” states \_\_\_\_\_

2. Reference to “war,” “battle,” or similar war-like terms \_\_\_\_\_

3. Terms that describe the U.S. as “divided” \_\_\_\_\_

4. Terms that describe the U.S. as “polarized” \_\_\_\_\_

5. Terms that describe the U.S. as “split” \_\_\_\_\_

6. Terms that describe the U.S. as “50-50,” “half,” or similarly \_\_\_\_\_

7. Terms that describe the U.S. as “separated” \_\_\_\_\_

8. Reference to “blue” states and/or “red” states \_\_\_\_\_

- 9. Reference to a “chasm” in describing the U.S. \_\_\_\_\_
- 10. Description of the U.S. via metaphors that pit two components of popular culture against one another (e.g., person A vs. person B; movie A vs. movie B; news source A vs. news source B) \_\_\_\_\_
- 11. Terms that describe the U.S. as “extreme” \_\_\_\_\_
- 12. Reference to “conflict,” “collision,” or “controversy” \_\_\_\_\_
- 13. Terms that describe the U.S. as “bitter” \_\_\_\_\_
- 14. Other terms consistent or synonymous with any of these \_\_\_\_\_

If yes, please list any keywords, catchphrases, or symbols found to be consistent with the polarization frame.

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APPENDIX C

TABLES

News Source	Polarization Frame		
	No (0)	Yes (1)	Total
<i>NY Times</i>	22.4%	77.6%	210
<i>USA Today</i>	18.3%	81.7%	218
ABC news	12.8%	87.2%	94
Fox news	10.8%	89.2%	83
Total	108	497	605

Table 1. Cross-tabulation of news source and the polarization frame.

Source	Polarization Frame Excerpts
<i>NY Times</i>	“And the intensity of feeling is red hot on both sides of the political divide.”
	“The red and blue clash ... the two political cultures of the state collide.”
	“Voters in this battleground of battlegrounds ... ‘Our country’s being divided by this.’”
	“She said of the election, ‘This is the first one I’ve ever noticed that’s dividing the family.’”
<i>USA Today</i>	“The nation is divided between staunchly Democratic and Republican states.”
	“Red and blue camps on the eve of another presidential election.”
	“But this year, with an electorate polarized from the start...”
	“A politically divided country is also at work...”
	“Voters are divided...the byproduct of a caustic campaign, a divisive war, and a presidency that voters love or loathe.”
	“Sen. John Kerry and President Bush polarized the country into blue-vs.-red-state uncivil war.”
ABC news	“The realities of an evenly divided nation... the hatred in this country...”
	“And in a nation so deeply divided on the issues...”
	“...houses divided. It’s been a very polarizing campaign... Passions are high. Emotions are raw. The electorate is split right down the middle between President Bush and Senator Kerry.
	“In a 50/50 nation, 50/50 families.”
	“Once more, divided.”
Fox news	“Very divided, 50/50. ... Folks still seem pretty divided.”
	“We’ve really polarized into two separate nations this year more than we were in 2000.”
	“And the danger in a polarized 50/50 nation...”

Table 2. Qualitative excerpts from content analysis illustrating the polarization frame.

Variables	Mean	Median	Mode	S.D.	Min	Max
Party Identification*	1.03	1	1	.78	0	2
Battleground State (yes)	.35	0	0	.48	0	1
Education	13.69	14	12	2.50	1	17
Gender (Female)	.53	1	1	.50	0	1
Age	47.27	47	28	17.14	18	90
Race (Nonwhite)	.27	0	0	.45	0	1
Income	14.62	16	23	6.33	1	23
Media Attention	3.88	4	4	.97	1	5
Political Discussion	3.44	3	0	2.78	0	8
Opinion Leader Contact	.63	1	0	.68	0	2
Being an Opinion Leader	.49	0	0	.50	0	1
Internal Efficacy	3.97	4	5	1.23	1	5
External Efficacy	3.15	3.25	3	.90	1	5
Voter Turnout (standard)	.82	1	1	.38	0	1
Voter Turnout (experiment)	.75	1	1	.43	0	1
Political Participation	.82	0	0	1.29	0	8

\*Republicans = 0, Independents and others = 1, Democrats = 2

Table 3. Descriptive summary statistics of the variables party identification, battleground state, education, gender, age, race, income, media attention, frequency of political discussion, contact with opinion leader, being an opinion leader, internal political efficacy, external political efficacy, voter turnout (standard version), voter turnout (experimental version), and political participation.



	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Int Efficacy								
(1)	1							
Ex Efficacy								
(2)	.18**	1						
Turnout S								
(3)	.21**	.13**	1					
Turnout E								
(4)	.24**	.18**		1				
Participation								
(5)	.13**	.12**	.25**	.24**	1			
Education								
(6)	.10**	.23**	.31**	.27**	.21**	1		
Female								
(7)	.02	-.08*	.00	.06	-.02	-.00	1	
Age								
(8)	-.00	-.00	.09*	.14**	.08**	-.11**	.04	1
Nonwhite								
(9)	-.10**	-.11**	-.17**	-.05	-.09**	-.11**	-.05	-.17**
Income								
(10)	.06	.20**	.29**	.22**	.18**	.41**	-.13**	.02
Partisanship								
(11)	.17**	.13**	.25**	.29**	.26**	.12**	.10**	.13**
Battleground								
(12)	.04	-.00	.12**	.03	.02	-.00	.02	.03
Media								
(13)	.20**	.15**	.29**	.32**	.30**	.16**	-.08*	.13*
Discussion								
(14)	.14**	.15**	.28**	.29**	.35**	.21**	-.01	.00
OL Contact								
(15)	.08*	.10**	.27**	.26**	.22**	.10**	.05	.23**
Being OL								
(16)	.13**	.06	.24**	.22**	.31**	.13**	-.04	-.07*
Mean	3.97	3.15	.82	.75	.82	13.69	.53	47.27
S.D.	1.23	.90	.38	.43	1.29	2.50	.50	17.14

\*\*p<.01 (two-tailed test), \*p<.05 (two-tailed test)

Table 6. Bivariate correlations of all dependent variables, control variables, and independent variables.

	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)	(14)	(15)	(16)
(1)								
(2)								
(3)								
(4)								
(5)								
(6)								
(7)								
(8)								
(9)	1							
(10)	-.14**	1						
(11)	-.06*	.11**	1					
(12)	-.13**	.07*	.00	1				
(13)	-.03	.13**	.27**	.00	1			
(14)	-.06	.18**	.20**	.08*	.36**	1		
(15)	-.20**	.18**	.06	.26**	.10**	.13**	1	
(16)	-.09**	.16**	.16**	.02	.25**	.36**	.12**	1
Mean	.27	14.62	2.82	.35	3.88.	3.44	.63	.49
S.D.	.45	6.33	1.01	.48	.97	2.78	.68	.50

\*\*p<.01 (two-tailed test), \*p<.05 (two-tailed test)

Table 7. Bivariate correlations of all dependent variables, control variables, and independent variables (cont.).

	<u>Internal Efficacy</u>			<u>External Efficacy</u>		
	b	$\beta$	F-change	b	$\beta$	F-change
(1)			4.18**			15.59**
Education	.04	.09**		.06	.18**	
Gender (Female)	.05	.02		-.12	-.07*	
Age	-.00	-.01		.00	.00	
Race (Nonwhite)	-.24	-.09**		-.17	-.09**	
Income	.00	.02		.01	.09**	
(2)			12.98**			5.74**
Partisanship	.19	.16**		.09	.10**	
Battleground	.08	.03		-.02	-.01	
(3)			27.88**			6.75**
Media Attention	.21	.17**		.08	.08**	
(4)			2.69*			3.72*
Discussion	.02	.05*		.02	.06*	
(5)			2.10			2.61
OL Contact	.06	.04		.08	.06*	
Being an OL	.13	.05*		-.09	-.05	
(6)			1.38			.05
Media*Partisan	-.04	-.03		.00	.00	
Discussion*Partisan	.05	.04		.01	.01	
OLContact*Partisan	.06	.05		.00	.00	

N = 1054

\*p<.05

\*\*p<.01

Table 8. OLS regression of internal political efficacy and external political efficacy on education, gender, age, race, income, partisanship, battleground state, media attention, political discussion, contact with an opinion leader, being an opinion leader, and the interactions variables.

<u>Political Participation</u>			
	b	$\beta$	F-change
(1)			15.53**
Education	.09	.18**	
Gender (Female)	-.02	-.01	
Age	.01	.09**	
Race (Nonwhite)	-.12	-.04	
Income	.02	.10**	
(2)			28.73**
Partisanship	.29	.23**	
Battleground	.05	.02	
(3)			2.91
Internal Efficacy	.07	.06*	
External Efficacy	.04	.02	
(4)			44.60**
Media Attention	.28	.21**	
(5)			64.10**
Political Discussion	.11	.24**	
(6)			29.57**
Opinion Leader Contact	.27	.14**	
Being Opinion Leader	.43	.17**	
(7)			12.74**
Media*Partisan	.08	.06*	
Discussion*Partisan	.12	.10**	
OL Contact*Partisan	.10	.08**	

N = 1054

\*p<.05

\*\*p<.01

Table 9. OLS regression of political participation on education, gender, age, race, income, partisanship, battleground state, internal political efficacy, external political efficacy, media attention, political discussion, contact with an opinion leader, being an opinion leader, and the interaction variables.



	Classification	-2 Log Likelihood	Wald	Exp (B)
(0)	78.6%			
Constant			299.98	3.67**
N = 1055				
(1)	79.4%	949.20		
Education			54.64	1.31**
Gender (Female)			2.16	1.28
Age			20.99	1.02**
Race (Nonwhite)			1.08	.83
Income			18.27	1.06**
Voting Control			7.52	.64**
(2)	82.1%	890.89		
Partisanship			51.55	1.86**
Battleground State			4.32	1.46*
(3)	82.5%	858.40		
Int Efficacy			27.87	1.43**
Ext Efficacy			1.68	1.14
(4)	83.6%	824.98		
Media Attention			32.25	1.71**
(5)	84.8%	804.99		
Political Discussion			18.59	1.18**
(6)	85.1%	763.21		
OL Contact			29.86	2.50**
Being an OL			5.44	1.61*
(7)	85.2%	752.41		
Media *Partisan			9.57	.74**
Discussion*Partisan			1.20	1.14
OL Contact*Partisan			1.22	.89

\*p<.05, \*\*p<.01

Table 10. Binary logistic regression of voter turnout on education, gender, age, race, income, voting control, partisanship, battleground state, internal political efficacy, external political efficacy, media attention, political discussion, contact with an opinion leader, being an opinion leader, and the interaction variables.

		Being an OL		Total
		No	Yes	
<u>OL Contact</u>	No	54%	42%	514
	Yes	46	58	552
Total		100% (n = 549)	100% (n = 517)	1066

Table 11. Cross-tabulation of opinion leader contact and being an opinion leader.

<u>Variables:</u>	<u>Opinion Leadership</u>			
	<i>No involvement</i>	<i>Low involvement</i>	<i>Moderate involvement</i>	<i>High involvement</i>
<u>ANOVA</u>				
Education	13.09	13.80	13.83	14.25
Welch = 10.42**				
Gender (Female)	.53	.56	.46	.54
Welch = 1.59				
Age	45.01	53.23	41.27	50.07
Welch = 25.28**				
Race (Nonwhite)	.40	.20	.33	.14
Welch = 20.78**				
Income	12.35	15.03	14.42	16.35
Welch = 19.56**				
Partisanship	2.61	2.76	2.91	3.06
Welch = 11.14**				
Battleground	.24	.47	.23	.47
Welch = 22.60**				
Media Attention	3.53	3.77	4.06	4.17
Welch = 26.93**				
Discussion	2.12	2.88	4.18	4.68
Welch = 63.39**				
Internal Efficacy	3.67	4.00	4.12	4.14
Welch = 8.95**				
External Efficacy	2.99	3.23	3.12	3.27
Welch = 5.52**				
Participation	.28	.60	.82	1.54
Welch = 54.76**				
Voter Turnout S	.60	.88	.85	.96
Welch = 23.90**				
Voter Turnout E	.52	.83	.79	.89
Welch = 20.03**				

\*p<.05, \*\*p<.01

Table 12. Means and ANOVA results based on opinion leadership categories.

<u>Hypotheses and Research Questions</u>	<u>Results</u>
RQ1: How frequently did the media use the polarization frame in coverage of the 2004 election?	Content Analysis: Very frequent (82.2% of coded stories)
H1: Attention to media coverage of the campaign is positively related to political efficacy and mobilization.	Survey: Supported
H1a: The relationship between attention to media coverage of the campaign and political efficacy and mobilization is moderated by partisan identity.	Survey: Partially Supported
H2: Frequency of political discussion with family and friends is positively related to political efficacy and mobilization.	Survey: Supported
RQ2: Is the relationship between frequency of political discussion with family and friends and political efficacy and mobilization moderated by partisan identity?	Survey: Mixed Results
H3: Contact with an opinion leader is positively related to political efficacy and mobilization.	Survey: Partially Supported Field Study: Supported
RQ3: Is the relationship between contact with an opinion leader and political efficacy and mobilization moderated by partisan identity?	Survey: Mixed Results Field Study: Supported
H4: Being an opinion leader is positively related to political efficacy and mobilization.	Survey: Partially Supported
RQ4: What are the various characteristics of opinion leaders and non-leaders as well as those contacted by opinion leaders and those not contacted by opinion leaders?	Survey: Significant Differences Field Study: Significant Differences

Table 13. Summary of research questions, hypotheses, and results by method.

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